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A BROKEN FAITH.

VOL. II.



# A BROKEN FAITH

BY

IZA DUFFUS HARDY

AUTHOR OF

“GLENCAIRN,” “ONLY A LOVE STORY,”  
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS  
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| CHAPTER                                       | PAGE |
|---|------|
| I. ACROSS THE GULF . . . . .                  | 1    |
| II. "DAYS OF SUMMER-COLOURED SEAS!" . . . . . | 32   |
| III. "ARE YOU A DREAM?" . . . . .             | 52   |
| IV. ON THE HEIGHTS . . . . .                  | 72   |
| V. TWO PAIRS OF LOVERS . . . . .              | 84   |
| VI. IN STORM AND SUNSHINE . . . . .           | 102  |
| VII. THE BAROMETER BEGINS TO FALL . . . . .   | 117  |
| VIII. A MEETING AND A PARTING . . . . .       | 143  |
| IX. BY HIS WILL . . . . .                     | 175  |
| X. DICK'S NEW FRIEND . . . . .                | 193  |
| XI. "HE IS THE MAN!" . . . . .                | 224  |
| XII. OUT OF THE DEPTHS . . . . .              | 249  |
| XIII. "I HAVE MY PART IN THIS!" . . . . .     | 268  |
| XIV. OVER THE PLOUGHSHARES . . . . .          | 282  |



# A BROKEN FAITH.

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## CHAPTER I.

### ACROSS THE GULF.

Are we not formed, as notes of music are,  
For one another, though dissimilar—  
Such difference without discord as can make  
Those sweetest sounds ?

SHELLEY.

THE laws of affinity and repulsion—or rather those mysterious instincts which seem amenable to no law, and which we seek in vain to reduce to order and classify according to cause and degree—are so strange in their workings that there was nothing very wonderful in the attraction

that drew Athelyn Hastings and Cressida Lane together.

From the hour that they first met, Paul never had reason for any anxiety lest they should not harmonise. They met frequently. Day after day Paul would bring Cressida to see Athelyn; and the friendship which had arisen from the first struck deeper root as the days and weeks passed. They were each a fresh experience to the other. Cressida was to Athelyn a new study, a new field for conjecture and analysis. Beyond the very genuine affection that was growing up in her heart for Cressida she found in her just such an object of interest as a child finds in an elaborate new toy or a naturalist in studying a new specimen. And Athelyn was to Cressida also something new; not only such a friend as she had never had before, but a nature such as had been hitherto unknown to her.



If the liking that these two conceived for each other was not wonderful, considering the circumstances which naturally inspired a mutual feeling of interest in both, still the influence they all unconsciously and speedily attained over each other's mind was something strange—stranger and stronger in reality even than it seemed. The two natures re-acted upon each other with a force that was altogether involuntary, and chiefly worked in the dark in subtle shades and changes unperceived then by themselves.

Over Cressida, Athelyn held the influence of the higher and the purer soul acting on one keenly susceptible to every breath of good or ill, apt enough to recognise and respond to all that was noble, more prone to hero-worship than to heroism. And over Athelyn Cressida's influence—though of a widely different kind—was not less in

degree, and of its kind was all for good. Her life as it touched Athelyn's broadened the horizon of the latter. Silently, subtly, even unconsciously, she entered into Athelyn's existence as a living proof of the narrowness of the groove in which her mind had worked hitherto. Years of study and of abstract discussion would not have widened and developed her nature so much as this intimacy with Cressida was doing. How often Paul had talked to her ; but Cressida's silent quiet life was more eloquent than all Paul's arguments.

Cressida came from that great outer world, whose very existence Athelyn, in the safe little creek in which her life was harboured, had almost in unconscious selfishness ignored. Through Cressida she learnt not only to look out and see, but to feel with, the storm-beaten souls she watched from her own safe anchorage. She recog-

nized now that one great human heart beats in the pulses of all the world—that in each lump of mortal clay, whether “for honour or dishonour made,” one ray of the same divine element burns, in some a half stifled smouldering spark, in others a fire that almost burns up the fragile frame of the flesh.

Paul Severne used to look gladly upon the two girls, as he found them sitting hand-in-hand, talking on some favourite theory or fancy; differing, perhaps, but never clashing; or Athelyn reading aloud to Cressida—reading Tennyson’s polished and perfect verse, that flows as easily and musically as a summer stream, or culling stray passages from the simpler and clearer of Browning’s poems, whose rough and tameless force sweeps away and overleaps the barriers of form and rule. Cressida liked the former best; the lovely appealed more to her than the grand;

and besides, we earlier learn to prize the smooth pearl than the uncut diamond, and meadow-paths are easier walking than Alpine rocky heights. Another day Athelyn would take down her favourite volumes of Morris from the library, and lead Cressida back into legendary days; then under the undefinable spell of his weird and vivid realism, the present melted away from their eyes, and the days of the sailing of the *Argo* and the fall of Troy, of Galahad's search and Tristram's love, arose before them; they roved, loved, and triumphed with Jason, sorrowed and rejoiced with Gudrun, and, with Launcelot shuddered at the echoes of

“The back-tolled bells of noisy Camelot.”

Give Athelyn a volume of one of her favourite poets, and she was always happy. Poetry with her was rather a passion than a taste; and she was as glad to read as

Cressida to listen. Cressida was wonderfully receptive and responsive ; quick of appreciation, if uncultivated in taste. She had a natural inclination towards poetry, written and unwritten, which, hitherto a struggling, half-recognized germ, had never been given room to expand, and take form and colour, until this new sunshine fostered it.

When Athelyn was alone with her, that difference of rank and education—which before they had met had seemed as if it must rear an impassable barrier between them—was to her as if it simply did not exist ; it had passed away into the limbo of forgotten things.

When they were together in public, however, it occasionally resuscitated itself, and poked its head up to remind them of its existence. When they took Cressida out for a drive, Athelyn wished that she would not *point* to the objects of her interest or

admiration; and at the theatre, pleased as she was that Cressida should enjoy herself, and sweet as was the tone of Cressida's laugh, she wished it did not ring quite so loud.

The occasion when Paul Severne's *fiancée* was to make what might be called her "first appearance in public" at one of the Hastings's fortnightly evenings "at home" was a subject of quite as much interest to Athelyn as to the bride-elect herself, and apparently of a great deal more interest than to the lover, who sauntered through the world quietly, taking things as they came.

Athelyn superintended Cressida's toilette with even more care than her own. She had chosen for Cressida's attire on this important occasion the stage *ingenue's* invariable costume—which off the stage is trying to all but the *beauté de diable*, and which she knew would be the very thing for

Cressida—simple white muslin, with no ornament save natural flowers. She wore herself a dress of some thin black gossamery material, through which her white arms and shoulders gleamed fair as pearl, with silver-leaved lilies lighting up the shadows of the black folds.

In these contrasted toilettes both girls looked their best. Athelyn, with all her willowy slightness, had the air and the step of a young queen; Cressida looked so young, so childlike, so innocently girlish, it seemed scarcely credible that such tears as she had shed had ever burned those soft blue eyes, or such bitterness hardened the mobile lines of those fresh lips with their shy sweet smile. Athelyn regarded her with the pride and satisfaction of an artist contemplating his *chef-d'œuvre*, and presented her to Paul with a satisfied smile, saying,

“She’ll do, won’t she?”

Paul nodded in silent appreciation ; he did not understand or appreciate the details, but he approved the general effect. Mr. Hastings smiled approval too, and in his old-world way complimented Cressida and felicitated Paul. The good old gentleman was always very kind to Cressida ; and indeed for Paul's romantic folly he was rather patted on the shoulder than doused with salutary cold water by the Hastings family.

To-night certainly Cressida, blushing and smiling with roseate anticipations, was a picture quite pretty enough to be a justification of her lover. That she would "do" admirably as far as personal appearance and attire went there was not the slightest doubt. Nevertheless as there are other qualities—some more and some less attainable—than a pretty face and a becoming dress—which may happen to be called upon in society, and as the Hastings did not wish



the circle of their friends in general to be enlightened as regarded all the circumstances of Paul Severne's choice—Athelyn surrounded the *débutante* with well-nigh as many precautions as if she had been a barrel of gunpowder. In her sweet serene way, as she glided about among her guests with the almost languid tranquillity that looked so difficult to ruffle, she kept an eye on Cressida, whispered injunctions to her mother to introduce her to amiable A., and keep her away from sharp-sighted B., and scandal-loving C., and herself hovered near to see that her tactics were successful.

“So Paul Severne has made his choice at last!” observed Lady Manville, seizing an opportunity of a few minutes' chat with Athelyn. “Well, I am glad it's not *you*, my dear! I was always afraid that he would persuade you that you had a vocation to help him to improve humanity.”

"There was never much chance of that."

"So much the better for you. As for him, of course he has made his choice just as he should *not* have done. What he ought to have gone in for would have been a plain elderly heiress, with an inclination to clothe the heathen. But the natural perversity of mankind—and womankind too—is astonishing. I give him credit for one thing, though—he has good taste. She's really very pretty—very young, I suppose?—quite a daisy of the field. I was talking to her—tried to set her off on the congenial subject of the *trousseau*, but I couldn't get anything out of her but monosyllables."

Athelyn thought that very probable.

"Who is she?" continued Lady Manville.

"Oh, nobody particular—an orphan," replied Athelyn, vaguely and safely.

"Where did he pick her up?—not in

*your* set or ours—lower down the ladder, *n'est-ce pas ?*”

“Probably, else she would not have been his choice. Paul regards most of our set as Lady Clara Vere de Veres,” said Athelyn, lightly.

“Well, she’s pretty enough to turn a man’s head. There is Colonel Vere looking at her ; here he comes to ask to be introduced. Look out for your friend Severne’s peace of mind now. Is he jealous ?”

“I don’t think there’s much of Othello in him,” Athelyn observed, as Colonel Vere approached, on the very errand Lady Manville had guessed. The Colonel, who was considered a first-class authority on female beauty, had, of course, turned his attention to the newest of the fair faces present, and was sufficiently dazzled by the great blue eyes, the child-like smile, and the sweet, fresh, unworldly expression, to go

the length of requesting an introduction.

Athelyn could not escape the duty of performing that ceremony, and, somewhat to her vexation, she had no sooner performed it than her attention was called upon elsewhere. She, however, soon returned, like the anxious mother-bird to her nest, to Cressida's neighbourhood, and her care was rewarded by catching some such scraps of dialogue as these :

"Heard Nilsson in 'Lohengrin'?" inquired the Colonel, who did not waste the breath so valuable to his country on superfluous words.

"No."

"Like Wagner—music of the future?"

"I—I hardly know."

"Not made up your mind? But you should hear Nilsson as Elsa—really very fine—that is, if you like her style."

"I have never heard her."

"Never heard Nilsson! But I ought not to be surprised. I suppose you're not out yet, or, at least, it's your first season?"

"Yes."

"Ah, fresh to it as yet—hasn't—a—begun to pall upon you?"

"No, indeed," replied Cressida, sweetly.

Colonel Vere waited to hear if she had any further observations to make, but in spite of her confiding, upward-glancing eyes and eloquent smile, and of the inspiring nature of the topic, she did not appear to have any sentiments to express about the London season. So he resumed:

"Fond of music?"

"Yes, very."

"I daresay I shall often see you at the Opera, then. Mine's a Saturday stall."

Unable to respond by returning a similar piece of information, Cressida observed,

"I have only been to the Opera once."

“What did you see?”

Cressida was puzzled ; she could recall nothing of the title but that it was a foreign name which had sounded like heathen gibberish to her. She had witnessed it from the gallery, had never seen the libretto, and the plot was as great a mystery to her as the language in which the *dramatis personæ* had expressed their joys and sorrows, which to her consequently appeared unaccountable.

“Whom did you hear, Patti—Albani?” pursued the Colonel, conversationally.

Cressida racked her brains in vain.

“I don’t remember,” she said, hesitatingly, “but the opera—was where he dances among skulls—with thunder and lightning.”

“Dances among skulls !” repeated Colonel Vere, mystified. “Oh, I see—‘Der Freischütz.’”

Athelyn thought it time to glide gracefully

into the conversation, and get the Colonel off the subject of the opera.

Still, on the whole, Cressida's first public appearance at the Hastings' was a decided success; she had made no blunders, had been, as a rule, instinctively safely monosyllabic; no jokes had been uttered in her hearing of sufficient brilliance to induce her to laugh too loud or rock herself backwards and forwards in the exuberance of her amusement; indeed, since her association with Paul and Athelyn, every little defect in her manner had been unconsciously smoothed away; and, above all, she had enjoyed herself simply and heartily as a child.

All this time Athelyn had not forgotten Paul Severne's words when first he appealed to her sympathy in behalf of Cressida. "I will tell you all the truth." "One who has erred—lured by false lights." She thought of them occasionally, not often, for indeed

in Cressida's presence it was impossible to remember them. But sometimes when Cressida's guileless, girlish face was out of her sight, those words of Paul's would recur to her mind, and she would wonder as to their true meaning. Generally she inclined to the belief that she must in her first idea have misinterpreted or mistaken them in some way; perhaps Paul himself had misunderstood some unintentionally ambiguous phrase in which Cressida might have made allusion to some past sorrow, probably her family misfortunes, as Paul delicately phrased it once, for the story of Cressida's father was, of course, completely put aside and ignored.

The month of May wore quickly by; the dawn of June was near, and in the hopes of the re-union this June should bring—for Harold Parkhurst had set his face homewards now—Athelyn was happy—happy,



too, in this mingling of a new and an old friendship. As to Paul Severne, he seemed happier than ever he had been in his life before, and Cressida seemed to grow younger, fairer, sweeter day by day.

Their marriage was regarded as an event to take place soon, though no date was yet fixed. Paul had once suggested an immediate union, but both Athelyn and the bride-elect had protested against a wedding in the unlucky month of May.

“I have only two superstitions in the world,” Athelyn had said, “and only two things to entreat of you. Don’t marry in May, and don’t sail on a Friday.”

It was certain now that there would be no marriage in May, and Paul, who despised superstition himself, but wished in no way to cross any fancy of Cressida’s, had cautiously promised that they would not sail on a Friday, if they could help it.

Meanwhile he was expecting letters by every mail from his cousins in Australia; he was working hard to get a little money together with which to start upon his new life, and very busy forming plans and building castles in the air, mostly of a sufficiently practicable architecture to be capable of a fair imitation on earth in the coming days. Still Paul Severne always seemed to lead two lives, one personal, one in his large interest in his kind. He never forgot the outside world in his own personal cares even now; and if from any deep sorrow of his own a laugh might have failed to stir him, from any joy of his a sigh of others would move him to turn and listen.

“It seems to me that though I’ve known Paul nearly all my life I never knew him so well as now that I know him through you,” observed Athelyn one day.

The two girls were sitting in the back

drawing-room by the open flower-framed window, after a long talk with Paul Severne, who had just taken his departure.

“I used to think of Paul as a dreamer,” continued Athelyn. “But I read him thoughtlessly—shallowly.”

“He does dream ; but he walks steadily on earth all the same,” said Cressida.

“He is always leading forlorn hopes—always thirsting to redress a wrong or attack a grievance,” said Athelyn, with an almost tender little meditative smile.

“Yes ; don’t you love to see him do it ?” responded Cressida, warmly.

“He ought to have been born in the days of the Round Table. He can’t see the ugliest monster growling over human bones without longing to go and beard him in his den ; he can’t pass the most frowning castle without trying to release the captive damozel. There’s no shield so powerful

that Paul wouldn't strike spear upon it if he thought there was a wrong behind—even if his spear was only a bulrush."

"That's well! David slew Goliath with a pebble," mused Cressida, earnestly. "And there's so much wrong—there's so much amiss that half the world doesn't dream of. Oh, I wonder, Athelyn, will all the woes of the world *ever* come right? will war and murder and crime—and poverty, that leads to all—*ever* be beaten out of the field?"

"I am afraid not, dear, while half the world sits helpless, and only here and there a David flings his pebble."

"Paul was reading to me the other day," said Cressida, after a pause, looking up thoughtfully, "about a great reservoir that burst. There were—I don't know how many thousand tons of water dammed in by a great embankment. And they saw a little, tiny trickle of water forcing its way

through the wall. And when they saw that they said, 'Save yourselves; the embankment must go!' And it did go—like a wall of child's toy bricks. That's what a little force like a drop of water may do if it only gets into the right place. I was thinking, Athelyn, there's been a great bank building, building up ever since the world began, crushing and pressing back half human nature. I think those days of feudalism, that Paul tells me about, must have built it highest. But there it stands now, and half the world is growling and chafing against the force that keeps it back. And perhaps some day—a crack of a finger's width in the great wall—and then all the waters will pour through."

"And make worse havoc! and set fire and sword where there was peace," rejoined Athelyn, rather mixing up her metaphors in her earnestness. "That's what the violent

washing away of all the old land-marks will do."

"Yes," assented Cressida, sadly. "Wrong makes wrong, doesn't it?"

"Well," said Athelyn, lifting her head with one of her free and noble gestures, and the look upon her face that sometimes seemed to reveal like a flash the potential heroine under the spoilt darling who slept on thornless rose-leaves, "if there is wrong that can only be righted by wrong—if where others suffer now it will be our turn to suffer next, we who now have our day ought not to cry out when we have our night. And when the old wall bursts, and the torrent sweeps away me and mine like weeds—well, it will be your turn to float then, Cressida, while we sink. But I don't think it will come in our generation."

"I hope it won't, if its coming would be bad for *you*. I wouldn't wish to rise at

your cost, Athelyn, nor to gain through loss to you and yours, never—no, not if it were to lift me up from death itself. Don't you know that, my darling, don't you?"

On Cressida's side there was a kind of adoration mingling in the familiarity of their friendship. Athelyn was "a bright particular star" of womanhood to her. She was shy and timid sometimes, when she felt very deeply; and Athelyn, instinctively knowing that the proverb of "still waters" was seldom truer than in Cressida's case, responded always to every demonstration of Cressida's with all the warmth of her heart, from which every vestige of the gentle glazing of outer frost which had once shielded it had melted now away. That safeguard of cool serenity had been only like the thin sprinkling of snow over spring violets, to melt at the first ray of the rising sun.

She took Cressida's hand in hers tenderly as she answered—

“I know that it would take a good deal of washing away walls and breaking down barriers to part us two, now that we have once come together.”

“So strangely, and yet so naturally,” murmured Cressida, ponderingly.

“We will not let this alliance of ours be broken,” said Athelyn, “not even when there's half a world of sea between us. We will bridge it over. And, by-the-by, that reminds me of a passage I marked only last night in ‘Aurora Leigh’ to read to you. You don't know ‘Aurora Leigh’? No? I thought not. Here it is.”

She took the volume from the table, and began turning over the pages till she found the part she sought, while Cressida sat silently listening, nestling close to her side.

Athelyn always read well; she had not



only all the polish and delicacy of perfect culture, but her voice was full of latent power and pathos, and bent itself in magical modulations, fine and subtle as the last dying chord of the Æolian harp, to every turn of the verse. All her heart was in her clear vibrating tones, that yet were soft as cooing of doves now, as she read fragments of the episode of Marian Erle, weaving together stray lines to paint the story, until she came to the passage she had especially marked.

“Marian, I being born  
What men call noble, and you issued from  
The noble people, though the tyrannous sword  
Which pierced Christ's heart has cleft the world in  
twain,  
’Twixt class and class, opposing rich to poor,  
Shall *we* keep parted? Not so! Let us lean  
And strain together rather, each to each—  
Compress the red lips of this gaping wound  
As far as two souls can.”

She paused, and putting the book aside,

looked down at Cressida, and laid her hand caressingly on the girl's fair head.

“There is so much in this poem that I never thoroughly understood till I knew you. I think our friendship is the dearer for the difference, is it not?” she said, simply, with her tender, dreamy smile ; for between these two there had been from the first as perfect a candour of speech as harmony of feeling ; they were not afraid to realize the truth that it *was* across the cleft that splits the world down to its sound core that they had come together.

Athelyn had noticed once or twice, with a gentle perplexity, that when she looked full in Cressida's eyes, and kissed or caressed her, as in her girlishly affectionate way she often did, it seemed to stir in Cressida something of painful emotion. This she did not comprehend, but had not dwelt much upon it, vaguely attributing it to shy-

ness, or an extreme sensitiveness of feeling.

Now she could not fail to observe that Cressida seemed to shrink from her look, from her caress; she saw on Cressida's face the colour flicker and fade, a mist dim the great blue eyes, and all the fair childish features contract and quiver as if in pain.

"Cressida, dear," she said, gently, less questioning than anxious and sympathetic, "what is it you are thinking of?"

The tears that hung like dew on Cressida's eyelashes brimmed over then; she seemed to recoil away from Athelyn's unconsciously penetrating gaze for a moment, then she buried her face on Athelyn's shoulder, and all her slight frame trembled like a wind-shaken reed.

Athelyn wondered; then an idea shot uninvited into her mind, and would not be dismissed.

"Are you—are you thinking, child," she

whispered, very softly, shrinkingly, “of some sorrow—something—that is past, and that—that I do not know?”

The girl answered not a word. Only, as if a hidden serpent had stung her, she writhed and shuddered with a great sob, and as if seeking shelter and refuge from some haunting reproach, she flung herself on Athelyn’s breast, and clinging to her, broke down into a passion of bitter weeping that Athelyn read at last aright.

Suddenly, now, the perception came upon her that, through some subtle spiritual influence, her very presence forced a sense of contrast to burn like a red seal on this other girl’s soul; she heard in the speechless passion of these tears a wail for a past beyond recall; knew that the serpent stinging was the awakened consciousness of a stain that on earth can never be washed quite away. No words were needed; no words

were spoken. In silence Cressida sobbed her sorrow out; in silence the light of intuition flashed upon Athelyn; in this new light she caught one glimpse—the first, and well-nigh the last—into the depths of Cressida's heart, heard the unuttered cry there of a craving and unquenchable regret.

“Once *I* was even as *you* are! I might this day have been like you!”

## CHAPTER II.

“DAYS OF SUMMER-COLOURED SEAS !”

I fill to-morrow and yesterday ;  
 I am warm with the suns that have long since set,  
 I am warm with the summers that are not yet;  
 And like one who dreams and doses,  
 Softly afloat on a sunny sea,  
 Two worlds are whispering over me !

SYDNEY DOBELL.

AFTER that May evening, the strangely-assorted trio—Paul, Athelyn, and Cressida—were more constantly together, and seemed linked by closer ties than ever. It was but a brief time they had to be together now. In June Mrs. Hastings and Athelyn were to go down to Fern Cottage, and later on in

the season to accompany Mr. Hastings to the South of France, for the autumn and winter. In July Paul and Cressida were to be married, and sail for Australia.

As the time drew near when this friendship must be broken up—as far as absence can break up an attachment so mutual, a union so harmonious—it grew dearer to them all; the shadow of imminent parting seemed alike to beautify and strengthen it.

It was singular that, as Athelyn had remarked, although she and Paul had always been good friends, yet now they understood each other so far better than ever. Cressida was the element that harmonised them; under her influence invisible letters deepened into light that enabled each to read the other's soul.

This curious alliance drew out to a singular degree qualities hitherto more or less latent in them all. All that there was of aspiring,

all that was imaginative—and also all of revolutionary and defiant and potentially heroic—in each nature seemed as if by some magic to be drawn to the surface now.

Athelyn was, on the whole, with all her poetic dreaminess, of an imagination more tame and manageable than Paul and Cressida, who were always soaring off into unbridled flights where every-day sense and reason could not follow them. To Athelyn poetry was a part of her life; but she prized the form of it as well as the spirit, loved the music of measured rhythm almost as much as the soul breathed in those harmonious words—nay, deemed the soul's complete utterance unachieved without that harmony. She saw little beauty in rough material; her taste demanded polish. Intellectually she was rather clear than brilliant, rather reflective than perceptive; her finest possibilities were more of breadth



than depth. Morally she was capable of the deepest and highest of feeling and action, more capable even than she yet knew herself to be. She had occasional moods of exaltation; but they were rare. Exaltation often leads to fanaticism; in Athelyn there was none of the material that makes the fanatic. Her spirit was of too steady and free a flight to dazzle and waver in the false glare of the mephitic gases that burn so many a poor moth's wings. The sun of one great faith, the God-ward yearning of the universe—no lesser light of human doctrine—would ever tempt her.

She was less likely to be in any way misled than Cressida, who was ever more influenced by the form than the spirit, who could better understand worshipping a carven saint than an unseen god, to whom the heroic attitude appealed more than the

heroic intent, who saw in life the beautiful as the only good, the ugly as the only evil.

Cressida was in a measure a mystery always both to Athelyn and to Paul. Paul thought he knew her ; but he only knew an ideal (a new and more mortal ideal than his old one), and an embodiment of certain theories which he called "Cressida." Athelyn could never quite decide, with all her affection for Cressida, whether the girl was most deep or shallow, childish or womanly, ignorant or world-wise. She could not even guess how much, or how little, Paul was beloved by his betrothed. Only she knew that Cressida was sincerely fond of *her* ; and to Cressida, since that May night when for once she read the cry of Cressida's wakening soul, she clung with doubly devoted faith.

Between these two there was not, could never be, the kind of confidence which

ordinarily forms an additional bond between two girls of similar age and mutual affection. To Cressida Athelyn never breathed Harold Parkhurst's name, nor let slip any allusion to her love and her hope. And she would no more have dreamt of questioning Cressida by a word or a look than she would have sought in curiosity to break open a coffin and pry into the ghastly secrets of the grave.

June came ; and as the time to part drew near, so also hope and joy drew nearer to Athelyn, as the vessel whose name was in her prayers every night bore Harold Parkhurst on his homeward way. Yet in these anticipations of the morning of love that was to dawn, she never forgot or drifted away from the friendship whose brief day of perfect intercourse seemed drawing to its close.

It was one of those epochs which, how-

ever brief, can never be forgotten ; the impression left by these days should never be effaced ; between the souls of these three the link of this one memory should endure ; and never should its influence pass away from their lives. It was one of those rare communions whose odour clings about us to the grave itself. The memory of such a time—though it touches the sphere of our life no more—yet for ever moves around it, inseparable as the moon from its sovereign planet, and moonlike shedding its pure and hallowed light across our midnight hours.

“If we never come back to England,” Cressida said, “we shall never forget you, Athelyn ! You will *be* England to us—to me at least. I’ve nothing and no one else this side of the world to regret. I shall be glad to have the sea between me and everything of England but you.”

“Are you fond of the sea, Cressida ?”

Athelyn asked, with apparent irrelevance.

“The sea? Oh, Athelyn, I’ve only seen it twice in my life! and once was when I was a little child. But I dream of it, just as one dreams of Heaven. One day when I saw it, it was stormy, and another, smooth. And in my dreams I see it—oh, so often!”

“I was thinking,” Athelyn continued, “that before we go down to Monksfield, and all our summer days together break up, we might manage all to have a day by the sea. Would you like to go down for a day or so to the sea-side somewhere with us?”

“Oh!” Cressida said, flushing with pleasure, “it would be beautiful!”

“You will have sea enough going to Australia!” laughed Athelyn.

“But *you* won’t be with us there—and I should dearly like to see the sea with you!”

Mrs. Hastings acceded to Athelyn’s wish

as usual ; and one morning the mother and daughter, Paul and Cressida, went by an early train to the sea-side, there to spend all that day and part of the next. It was their last, or almost their last, day together, as the move to Monksfield was now close at hand.

On their way down in the train they were a merry quartette, full of that witless mirth which bubbles up from the lightest hearts and ripples into the happiest laughter ; and Cressida was the gayest of all.

When they reached their destination, and went for a ramble along the beach with the sea-breeze beating in their faces, she was brimming over with pure childlike joyousness. She raced the waves, running close to the shore and flying back with little screams when the wave chased her. Every baby digging with its wooden spade seemed to her a noteworthy object of attraction ;

every sand-castle interested her as much as if she had been one of the ring of small architects sitting round ; every sail upon the sea was a new delight. She called the attention of her companions to each and all of these wonders with eager glee ; kept every now and then darting from their side after some fresh attraction ; and was altogether as delighted and uncontrollable as a playful puppy honoured by being taken out for a walk with his master.

They wandered far on to where the beach was lonelier and sat down to rest. Then Cressida's mood changed ; she fell into silence and stared out across the sea, and drew long breaths, drinking in the air that blew fresh from "the salt, sweet foam," her face full of that

" Longing  
That is not akin to pain,  
And resembles sorrow only  
As the mist resembles rain."

It was a royal sea that day—a sea that reflected all the changing moods of the cloud-and-sun-shot sky—a sea whose azure lights melted into amethyst shadows, while all along the horizon lay a line of vivid emerald. A ripple of creaming surf ran round the curve of the shore, and here and there a white sail caught the sun and flecked like a gleam of light the green depths of the shadowy distance.

“Are you tired, Cressida dear?” asked Athelyn, noticing the grave fixity of her unsmiling lips, from which the laughing, dimpling curve of half an hour ago had utterly vanished.

“No, no—only—it’s so beautiful!” Her eyes dimmed as she took Athelyn’s hand. “And—you’re all so good to me!” she added, softly, in a voice that reached Athelyn’s ear alone.

Those hours by the sea were always here-



after framed in all their recollections as a picture apart. Never before had they felt the sea-spray blow in their faces together, and together they were to feel it never again. How the strong, sweet breeze stirred their hair and kissed colour into their cheeks! How Cressida lifted her bent head and laughed with delight when a shower of dancing spray splashed into her face!

“Every wave seems as if it wanted to tell a story!” she said. “Listen! Doesn’t it seem as if there were voices calling—calling—that they have a story for us to listen to?”

“Yes, every wave has its story, if we could only translate its language; it would solve half the mysteries of life and death,” said Paul, gravely. “Athelyn, you are the one for quotations; what are those lines of Kingsley’s?”

Athelyn knew them, of course, and repeated them.

“I cannot tell what you say, green leaves,  
I cannot tell what you say,  
But I know there is a spirit in you  
And a word in you this day.

“I cannot tell what you say, brown streams,  
I cannot tell what you say,  
But I know that in you too a spirit doth live  
And a word doth speak this day.”

“No one like Kingsley for the intense realisation of the wedlock beyond divorce of Humanity and Nature,” observed Paul.

Cressida looked up, and glanced from Athelyn to Paul, with the expression in her eyes that always somehow suggested a dumb soul wandering around its prison, trying to find the escape of utterance. Paul looked at her and forgot Kingsley.

“Some of us come very near to comprehension of and communion with the all-pervading spirit, in silence,” he said. “No one

quite reaches it, but I think little children sometimes come very near to it, and some of us are children still in heart."

Cressida did not answer, and though she listened, she scarcely seemed to hear; over her face one of its subtle changes wavered for a moment, and then her features settled into the look that was unfathomable in its very simplicity.

All the hours of the day that they could spare they lingered by the sea; Cressida, for her part, regarded dinner as an altogether unwelcome interruption and intrusion on the day. Paul was not of her opinion; he was healthily hungry, and led a crusade against hereditary monarchy, very much to his own satisfaction, between the courses.

In the evening the three young people went out, and of course wandered down to the sea again. It had changed since they had turned away from it; the dusk had

closed, and the moon arisen. The shore was quiet now, and almost deserted. The clouds had fallen, and left a moon-lighted vault of amethyst above; the great waters had calmed down, and were kissing and whispering instead of lashing the shore.

They had left a shadowy sea of green and purple depths and blue reflections. They came back to a sea all shining silver, every little wave tipped with wonderful white light. Paul and Athelyn talked of Hiawatha, pictured his canoe drifting out across those silver waves, as it

“Sailed into the purple vapours,  
Sailed into the dusk of evening,”

talked of Avalon, wondered how far beyond that bright horizon lay the island

“Where never wind blows loudly!”

Cressida sat silent and listened, and gazed out to sea, and idly picked up handfuls of moon-washed pebbles, and let them slip

shining through her fingers. Every now and then Paul looked down at her, and in the dusk their hands met, and rested clasped in the shadows.

Cressida wished the world could stand still in the perfect peace of that summer evening; she felt she wanted nothing more, only to sit there and listen to the whisper of the waves, and look away into the moonlight mystery of the horizon, with Paul and Athelyn by her side. In this still and serene hour she did not want to think of the future. For the future is eternally linked with the past; and after every wave that whispers "Hope!" the recoil-wave breathes "Remember!"

Paul was perfectly happy; but *he* did not wish the world to stand still; he had his castles to build,

"Mighty battles to fight, fierce conventions to slay!"

Athelyn was happy, happy chiefly because

the world as it moved was bearing her towards the day she longed for—because at every pulse-beat the hour of Harold Parkhurst's return drew nearer, nearer—because her field of hope spread before her, limitless as that restless ocean looked, and just as she saw no land-line across the shining sea, so she saw no boundary to the radiant possibilities that reached away and lost themselves in dream-land.

They sat there, sometimes silent, sometimes speaking whatever words rose from the heart to the lips, as only in our happiest, serenest hours we speak—while the shadows crept over the silver flood, and the wide plain of moonlight narrowed, and the cool night-dews fell.

At last, reluctantly and lingering, they returned to Mrs. Hastings, who was reclining comfortably in an easy-chair, with a reading-lamp and a novel, and anxiously hoped that

they had none of them taken a chill from the night-air.

Athelyn and Cressida shared one room that night. They looked out upon the undulating opal sea, the moonlight resting coolly on Cressida's fair hair, and chastening its tawny warmth to shadowy gold, and hallowing with white light Athelyn's pure profile, from which the dusky hair swept back—

“Making her doubly fair, thus dárkly set.”

Hand in hand they watched the bright waves race rippling shorewards.

“How many things you have done for me, Athelyn!” Cressida said, gratefully—  
“how much you have given me! I wonder if ever I shall be able to do anything for you? If I can, I will,” she added, slowly.

“You do enough for me, dear, in letting me think that I have been something

to you. For it is very sweet to think."

"*Something* to me, Athelyn! Oh, you are what I *wanted*—what I have wanted all my life. Paul is good; he is all that a man can be, but I have so craved and longed for a *woman* friend. It was a woman's hand I felt I needed to help me, and yours has been the hand, and I thought there was none—none—like you who would hold out a hand to me."

Her voice trembled; she laid her cheek on Athelyn's hand with one of her shy, caressing gestures of untaught grace. Presently she said, as if the words burst from the hidden fret of a ceaseless longing and discontent,

"Oh, I wish—I *wish*, Athelyn, that I could forget all my life till this last few months—I wish I could sponge out *all* my past, every line of it!"

"Ah, Cressida darling, none of us can



efface our past, not even if we would buy its obliteration with life itself. But turn the page, dear—look to the new life before you, and thank God, as I thank God for you, that you are safe now—safe sheltered in a true man's love.”

## CHAPTER III.

“ARE YOU A DREAM?”

As the blood of the flower ere she blows  
Is beating up to the sun,  
And her roots do hold her down,  
And it blushes and breaks undone  
    In a rose,  
So my blood is beating in me, love.

I see thee nigh and nigher,  
And my soul leaps up like sudden fire,  
    My life's in the air  
    To meet thee there,  
To meet thee coming to me, love.

SYDNEY DOBELL.

IN the golden June weather Athelyn went back to Fern Cottage. There, where a year ago she had wandered with Harold Parkhurst under the garden trees,

on that one bright day when he had seen her in her fairest light, as the sunbeam of her home, she waited now for him to return to her. There the June days—that until this summer had always seemed to fly—slid slowly, slowly by, as she counted their hours, and wondered, with all the untamed impatience of youth, each day “would the sun never set?”—each evening “would the morrow never dawn?”

And still as the day that was to re-unite them drew nearer, to her eager heart that fretted against time and space, it seemed to recede. Along the old paths where her childish feet had raced she wandered and watched, in the feverish flush of a hope that pulsated sharply as pain. Under the old mulberry-tree she read the letter that told her, when he landed, how near the hour of meeting came. And in the blackbird's morning song, as in the last notes of the

departing nightingale, in the buzz of the bees, the murmur of the boughs, she heard only the echo of the words he wrote. She saw them written glowing in the sunshine—they danced across the blue of the sky—

“I am coming, my love, my bride—I am coming to claim my welcome from the eyes that have been to me through all this long, long year the guiding stars to light me back to England and to love!”

In her dreams the words thrilled in her ear “far above singing!” and as she woke their echo greeted her softly as a kiss, “My love—my bride!”

The birds sang love; the flowers bloomed for love; all the June world seemed one vast smile and sigh of love to Athelyn as she waited for her lover.

Yet when he came at last, when she heard from above his voice, his step in the hall, she did not fly down the stairs to meet

him. Her heart leapt, then seemed to cease to beat. Her hand instinctively sought and clasped her mother's hand; save for that movement she was still as if carved in stone, scarcely even breathing. Hope had stirred and animated her; Joy startled and half stunned her. In that moment the joy that had come so close, that was knocking at the very gates, seemed suddenly to flash far away into the distance. It was impossible to believe that it was really near.

She turned her face away from her mother's tender, sympathetic look, felt she would have fled miles to escape even her mother's eyes, although still she clasped her hand tight.

“Will you go down, my darling?” Mrs. Hastings said, after waiting awhile for Athelyn to speak; “or shall I see him first?”

Five minutes afterwards Athelyn enters the drawing-room, alone, and she and

Harold Parkhurst stand face to face again. His gaze is fastened on the door; his eyes fix on her with a flash of joy that suddenly transfigures his face; he makes one quick step to meet her, and as silently as she holds out her hand, he grasps it in his, and gazes at her still without a word. The first look of a returning exile on the earliest glimmer of the white cliffs of the land that he left half a lifetime ago is not more deeply glad—glad with that passion of great joy that no words dare to mock, that all but breaks through the frail barrier between delight and pain.

The white lilies blooming in the golden sunlit garden are not lovelier nor whiter than Athelyn as, pale with the happiness that scarcely yet seems tangible, that, long expected, comes as a shock at last, she meets his gaze. If a year has changed her at all, it is only to add a ripening, com-

pleting touch to her beauty. His memory of her was a vision of loveliness, but not lovelier than is this living face, pure as marble, with the sensitive, perfect lips, the wide white brow, the matchless curve of outline of cheek and throat, the coils of hair dark and soft as night wound round the little classic head—and, above all, the very light and soul of her beauty—the black-fringed eyes of changeful grey, deep as the sea and mild and warm as Italian moonlight.

Nor is he changed, save that the Indian sun has deepened the sallow olive of his cheek. Tall, lithe, and supple as a panther, with the sombre brow and the deep-set eyes—eyes that are strangely, enthrallingly tender at this hour—he is just the same Harold Parkhurst who looked her soft, self-ignorant heart away.

So they are face to face again, those two,

who loved and parted a year ago. Now they love more madly—what is love but madness?—for the severance, and though it is the first-fruit of her heart, with all the dewy bloom upon it, that she gives to him, while he to her can only offer an incense that has burnt on many altars, still it is a question this day which of them loves the most.

Yet they are strangely calm in this meeting, and no exclamation nor agitation, no flush nor tremor, mars its perfect peace. As creatures meeting in dream-land, they look at each other, with a wonderful and half-divine sense of unreality seeming to bear them up above the world, as if it was not earth beneath their feet.

It is scarcely a wonder that he says at last, in a sort of hushed and tranced delight,

“Are you a dream, Athelyn, or are you mortal woman?”



“Mortal enough,” she answers, with a tender light like the dream of a smile just wakening on her lips. “And yet I can’t be sure even now that it’s not all a dream. We are awake, and you are here, really and truly?”

“Really, truly I am here, in flesh and blood. And are you glad?”

“Yes,” she says, softly.

“And I—am I glad? Athelyn, do you think—do you *know* that I am glad?”

“I think you are,” she whispers, as her eyes sink for the first time away from his face, and the faint flame of a blush flickers through her paleness.

“You are not changed, not a whit,” he says, clasping tighter the slim hand he had taken as if it were a flower. “Was it yesterday we parted? Athelyn, do you remember that June morning?—how cool and fresh it dawned!”

“ A year ago !” she answers, with half a smile, and half a happy sigh.

He takes a step nearer to her side, and his arm steals round her supple waist ; her head droops like a lily heavy with dew, and her heart flutters now, as the dream seems to become reality.

“ Look up, my darling—look up at me,” he says. Even in his softest and tenderest accents there is always a despotic undertone.

Obediently as a child she lifts her down-cast face, and their lips meet in one long kiss.

When Mrs. Hastings came in, the rustling of her silk dress discreetly heralding her approach, neither of the two could have guessed whether she had left them three minutes or three hours. Such moments as those are beyond any calendar ; there is no reckoning them even by heart-throbs.

Harold Parkhurst went forward to meet Mrs. Hastings eagerly, warmly, half appealingly. He took both her hands and looked down into her kind, fair face, as he said,

“Have *you* a welcome for me, too?”

“I have, indeed—a warm one!” she said, cordially and truly, for one glance had shown her, upon Athelyn’s face, the light of a high happiness that she had never seen there before.

“Thanks!” he said, in his most winning way. “You are good! If—if Athelyn’s mother had not given me kind greeting, all England would have seemed to frown a cold welcome upon me!”

The days that followed this were of a happiness most pure and unalloyed. Harold Parkhurst took up his quarters at the “Green Dragon,” the nearest approach to an hotel of which the village of Monksfield

could boast; he extemporised a studio out of a large sky-lit shed, which had never been so æsthetically occupied before, and about whose deal tables and backless benches there seemed at first to cling an aroma of coarse tobacco and bitter beer; but these spirits were speedily exorcised when Mr. Parkhurst took possession of the place, when striped tiger-skins were thrown upon the floor, and half-finished sketches leant against the walls, and the table was banished in favour of a tall gaunt easel, and the odour of oil-paint conflicted with that of Havana cigars.

Mr. Parkhurst was not a great and inveterate smoker; he could even be happy for two or three consecutive hours in a pure and unpolluted atmosphere; but he liked his choice cigar and dainty cigarette pretty frequently.

Serenely ignoring the interest that he and

his belongings, his foreign-looking boxes, his big portfolios, and the mysteries of his paint-boxes and palettes, inspired in the inhabitants of Monksfield, he settled himself contentedly down to painting and love-making—for a time. Presently, he said, he might have to be running up and down rather constantly to and from London, but for a few weeks he struck his tent at the “Green Dragon.”

The terms on which he and Athelyn were, and into which they had rather drifted than steered with open and watchful eyes, received the tacit sanction of Mrs. Hastings, although no business-like preliminary matrimonial conversations took place between the mother and the lover. It was understood, without being put into lucid and perspicuous phrase, that he loved Athelyn, and wished to marry her as soon as he could provide her a suitable home, and that she entirely

reciprocated his affection and his wishes. But no communications were made to the various members of the Hastings family, or to friends and neighbours ; no formal compact of betrothal took place, and no label of “Engaged” was publicly attached to Harold and Athelyn, although of course, “whene’er they took their walks abroad,” there were sure to be some sympathetic and curious glances following them, some floating whisper in the air connecting their names together.

Athelyn hated to be talked about ; Harold entirely agreed with her. Mrs. Hastings thought that it was as well “under the circumstances”—the circumstances being that Mr. Parkhurst’s pecuniary position did not appear to warrant speedy matrimony—that no ceremonious announcement should be made. The position of affairs was sure to leak out gradually, and make itself evident

in a little time; so to time these happy lovers left it, and drifted along in perfect peace and bliss.

Mrs. Hastings liked Harold Parkhurst. The citadel of her affections was one easy to be carried, and what does not always follow, one easy to hold. She was of a responsive, affectionate, and clinging nature; her heart would have opened to anyone Athelyn loved, but she gave more than this mere vicarious liking to Harold Parkhurst. He was just the man to puzzle and attract her; the half rough force about him contrasted with her somewhat indolent softness; moreover, he had never in his life failed to fascinate, in a greater or less degree, any woman he wished to please, and he did very much wish to please Mrs. Hastings. Thus, there was no flaw in Athelyn's happiness.

Mr. Parkhurst had two works now on hand, one a commissioned picture to adorn

the walls of a certain wealthy Manchester merchant, the other he intended for exhibition. The first was an Indian scene—a background of tall palm-trees and a ruined temple; in the foreground a Hindoo girl kneeling by the river watching the little lamp which she had set afloat, and which, according to the superstition, bore the fate of her future in its course, and forecast the wreck or the safety of her love.

Athelyn looked on this as a picture only, critically, sympathetically, admiringly. She had no misgivings, no forebodings as to her own future. No instinct warned her that her hopes were set in a frailer vessel than that little lamp to drift on a more dangerous river. Her love seemed to her as a stately ship with fair winds filling its snowy sails in the sunlight. There was nothing to whisper of wreck or storm to her. The other picture was as yet only half finished; it was



a shadowy and sombre scene ; sad autumn trees in a grey twilight ; a cold, melancholy moon just sailing up from misty clouds ; grim, grey walls of a convent showing through the trees ; a woman leaning on a grey stone window-sill looking up at the sky, a lamp on the sill by her side, a letter open in her hand. She was in a nun's garb ; the yellow rays of the lamp, and the chill moonlight met and mingled on her face ; the picture was to be called “Heloise.”

Mrs. Hastings did not particularly like it, although she thought herself obliged to say it “would be very beautiful when it was finished.” It was too grey and melancholy to please her. “Couldn't you put a bit of bright colour somewhere in it?” she suggested. The face of Heloise appeared to the eye of a looker-on to all intents and purposes finished ; but the artist was working at it still, and seemed never satisfied.

It was beautiful and mournful and noble, patient and passionless in its great sorrow; the eyes that had no future on earth to look to, no past it was not poison to contemplate, had that seeking gaze that seems to reach away to heaven and wander hopelessly round heaven's closed gates. It was most mortal in its pain, and yet had something of the angelic in its patience and its prayer. It was a silent poem, that pale uplifted face in all its desolated beauty, yet Harold was ever discontentedly altering and putting some fresh touch to it.

"I haven't got a proper model, that's it," he said, knitting his brows as he contemplated it alternately from the left light and the right.

"Couldn't I help you if I sat for it?" asked Athelyn, simply.

He regarded her critically, rather with the eye of the connoisseur than the lover.

“No, I don’t think you would do,” he said, meditatively. Her face fell a little, quite unconsciously to her; but noting this, he added quickly, “You’re pretty enough, my darling—good heavens, it’s not *that*! But—well! I don’t care for you to sit for this. Besides,” he continued, “you haven’t got the expression; how should you have?—You look as if there was in you so much of the angel that you *might* forgive, but for Heloise I want the look of the soul that *has* forgiven. ‘Unto seventy times seven!’ that is a god-like sentiment that is womanly too, but it’s hard for a man to seize, or even to understand, yet I know that’s what I want for this face. How could you know what it is—you who were never wronged, you who never had anything to forgive?”

“No,” she said, looking up thoughtfully, struck by this idea, “I never had. I wonder, *should* I forgive?”

“ Ah, you shall never be tried, my love,” he said, forgetting Heloise in Athelyn’s living beauty, “ never, while you are true to me.”

“ How long will that be ?” she said, softly, with a half coquettish, half tender upward glance—speaking far less in coquetry than in a sort of shy shrinking consciousness of her own great love that seemed almost to oppress her and that she strove in words to deal with lightly.

“ Ah ! how long ? Whoever painted Love without wings ?”

“ Oh, Harold ! Whoever loved who believed in the little winged god with his arrows being the true Deity of Love ?”

“ He moults his wings once in a cycle perhaps,” Harold admitted. “ But still, my child, to-day is all that’s ours ; let us live to-day.”

She glanced at him deprecatingly ; and a

touch of sadness came over her face as she looked on the face of the Heloise, white with its unutterable woe.

“So *she* must have thought once,” she murmured.

“So she did,” he agreed, and his face clouded too. “But why are we talking of tragedies, and flying and dying Loves? Let us live to-day; and there couldn’t well be a brighter summer day! There! I’ll put away my brushes, and come out with you.”

## CHAPTER IV.

## ON THE HEIGHTS.

I took you—how could I otherwise ?

For a world to me, and more ;

For all, love greatens and glorifies

Till God's aglow to the loving eyes,

In what was mere earth before !

ROBERT BROWNING.

THAT summer ! Athelyn seemed to live through the heart-throbs of an ordinary lifetime in every day of it. The hours fell by like notes of music, each sweet chord silenced dying unregretted for the sake of the coming sweetness. To have lived such a summer is to shut out from one's soul for

ever the possibility of crying in any despair,  
“Why was I born?”

Harold appeared to find the conjoint occupations of painting and love-making eminently satisfactory. He did not confine his brush solely to those two canvases—the “Hindoo Girl” and the “Heloise.” At leisure hours he made sketches about the neighbourhood—studied bits of background—immortalised donkey-carts and duck-ponds—enshrined himself in the memory of old women who struck him as weird and witch-like, or typically grand-maternal—and of course took Athelyn’s portrait over and over again. He sketched her in pencil; he sketched her in crayons; he made a study of her in water-colour; and planned the large oil-painting of which she should be the central figure, which he would set to work at directly he went back to his town studio.

Athelyn was no artist herself ; whenever she attempted to portray the landscape her grass looked like a green river and her river like grass, her foliage straggled about as if a green spider had crawled over the paper, and her cottage walls sloped like the Leaning Tower of Pisa. However, notwithstanding her careless and unpractised hand, she had a quick eye for form and colour, and a love that was almost a passion for beauty in every way in which it can manifest itself, by whatever channel it finds its course through the senses to the soul, whether as music it reached her through the ear or as painting appealed to her through the eye.

Thus Harold Parkhurst found in her a thoroughly sympathetic spirit, which was well for his faith to her, as the one thing that would have most speedily disenchanted and wearied him, and ruffled his vanity,



would have been to find in the woman who loved him indifference to, or non-comprehension of, his art, or, worse than all, a real indifference masked under feigned interest. But in Athelyn's interest there was no feigning. Heart and soul, with all her keen susceptibility to beauty, her admiration for the artist merged and mingled into her love for the man, she threw herself into perfect sympathy with all his aims, hopes, and achievements.

They were happy, very happy. The wisest and oldest of us are but children in the unalloyed simplicity of our deepest happiness as in our greatest pain. Pain and joy are pure unmixed elementary feelings still in their extreme, even in this age of wire-drawing and hair-splitting. Children were never more simply happy than these two lovers, one of whom was guileless as a child still, while even in the other's world-

worn heart the spring of youth was yet unexhausted, and seemed now to well afresh in this new love.

From out that golden summer, when the time came that it was the past to Athelyn—"the past," for she seemed to have no other past but that—certain hours shone out in the vivid light that, with such insufficient cause, flames across some recollections for ever.

Still, when she looks back, they are saying good night at the gate, in the shadows of the fresh-scented lime-trees, the faint starlight obscurely outlining their faces, clinging hand to hand, and lingering inseparably, as if, like the immortal lovers who stand through ages as the incarnation of Love, they

"Could say good night till it were morrow."

Often and often they say good night at that gate in the summer starlight. How is

it that one night, when a spray of honeysuckle falls from her hair, and he picks it up and shakes the dew from it, and lingers replacing it among the ruffled braids, stands out in her recollection?

Often she reads to him. He is never tired of hearing his favourite poets interpreted by the voice he loves. For hours she, untiring too, will read while he sketches or lounges and listens. How is it that one hour, when she reads one of those that she loves best among Byron's poems, "The Siege of Corinth," to him, and he lies on a heap of fresh-cut, fragrant hay at her feet—seems to crystallise all such hours into itself when she looks back to it, and for ever the sharp, sweet, pungent scent of the hayfields recalls it to her?

We never guess at the moment what trifles light as air are fixing in our brain for ever. Memory, capricious in her faith as

in her fickleness, will attach herself with strange constancy to some one unimportant detail among many. A woman may have forgotten places and seasons that have exercised more influence over her life, but she shall recollect to her death the pattern of a ribbon she could give no good reason for remembering; and on the last day of his life, when all other accounts and arithmetic are washed out of the weakening, wandering brain, a man shall be able to swear to the exact number of centimes he paid for one trivial purchase among many which he bargained for among the Jews on the Rialto.

Another of the days that Athelyn remembers best, Harold and she are sitting in the orchard on a shady bench between two trees. The dogs have found them out, and joined them in a social little group. Tim,

half lost among the long grass and clover, is digging a hole to bury an old bone which he has picked and polished to ivory. Collie is lying like a dead dog stretched out stiff in the sunshine. Jim, at Athelyn's feet, is enjoying a feast of the buttons and hem of her dress.

"That dog will have indigestion," observes Harold, languidly. "He has eaten a yard and a half of your trimming already."

"Dear Jim!" remarks Athelyn, as if she thought this a very clever feat. "But you shouldn't do that, Jim!" in honeyed tones that could not to the most intelligent quadruped have conveyed any idea of rebuke. "I love dogs," she adds unnecessarily.

"I see you do," he says, smiling. "Do you take the pack about with you wherever you go?"

“I take Tim and Jim to London always. When we go abroad I leave them behind. But they miss me very much. Do you know, Jim cries real tears? Once he cried till he quite lost his voice. Why are you laughing? it’s quite true. I am always really grieved to part with him.”

“When we travel then I suppose I must resign myself to take a dog or two—at first, until I turn tyrant!”

“I don’t think you’ll do that,” she responds with a shy trusting smile. “And I won’t take so much as a puppy in a basket if you don’t like it, I promise!”

“I hate dogs travelling, I own. I’ve had enough of it.”

“Did you ever take your dogs travelling then?”

“Once I carried a St. Bernard pup in a hamper for a fortnight. How the little brute used to howl!”

“And did it grow up a big beauty?” inquires Athelyn, with interest. “And where is it now?”

“God knows! I neither know nor want to know!” he replies with energetic sincerity.

“Why?” she asks, glancing up with astonished eyes.

Harold looks away and throws a pebble at Collie.

“Oh—it was a bore,” he answers vaguely.

“But you are fond of dogs,” asserts Athelyn, positively, “you always pay them little attentions——”

“Such as this!” he interposes, aiming another pebble at Collie’s feathery tail, which lies in a lazy curve, too sleepy even to wag at these marks of amity.

“And they all love *you*. Did you notice how they all took to you from the first?”

I have such faith in animal instincts. I don't think I could believe in anybody whom dogs distrusted."

"And you believe in me?" he rejoins, ceasing to make Collie's tail a target, and looking in her face with the half levity, half earnestness, that somehow bears the unmistakeable stamp of sincerity, while only missing by a hair's breadth giving the very opposite impression.

"Yes, I believe in you."

"Darling!" he says, drawing her closer to his side and softly kissing her. "It's sweet to be believed in by you!" Then he smiles as he adds, "Once, Athelyn, when I asked you if you loved me, you said you did not know! I wonder, do you know now, child? Have you solved that question yet?"

"I do know now. I think I found out long ago."



“Well,” he persists, “tell me, do you love me now?”

She looks at him with all her answer in her passionate, pure eyes. There are no eyes for melting with love—neither the liquid blue orbs nor the fiery black—like the deep sea-grey, that in calm hours are pure and cold as winter moonlight, and when once the fire is kindled in them, glow with all the softness of a summer sunset and all the warmth of a tropic noon.

“Ah, Harold,” she whispers, and her sweet voice steals into the very depths of his heart, “you know—you know that I love you more than life! You have taken all my life into your own! In all my heart, in all my soul now, I feel as if there was nothing left but love for you!”

## CHAPTER V.

## TWO PAIRS OF LOVERS.

How canst thou gaze into those eyes of hers  
 Whom now thy heart delights in, and not see  
 Within each orb Love's philtred euphrasy  
 Make them of buried troth remembrancers ?

ROSSETTI.

**I**N a London back parlour, through whose dusty windows the level western sun shoots in warm ruddy rays, Cressida Lane is sitting, availing herself of the last hour or so of daylight to get on as far as possible in her work of repairing and transferring the flowers of some cobwebby coffee-coloured old lace.

She looks well and prosperous, for her at

least, prosperity being like most other conditions of life, comparative. She has on a pretty and simple summer dress, with a touch or two of characteristic coquetry about its arrangement; her hair is somewhat elaborately braided and curled, and although the parlour whereof she is at present the sole occupant is bare of ornament, faded in colouring, and shabby in furniture, it is a decided improvement on the shop and kitchen at Mrs. Brown's. Moreover, under this roof she herself is regarded in a different, and to her far more pleasing, light than under the roof where Mrs. Brown presided.

There she had been looked upon, at first, either as an unnecessary and tolerated appendage to the household, a scapegoat for other's humours, or a kind of general-utility creature whom everybody sent on errands; and, later on, as occupying an uncomfortable anomalous position, "neither fish, fowl,

nor good red herring," as Mrs. Brown had once observed cuttingly. Here she is independent, is regarded as being both useful and ornamental, and a flavour of romance clings about her, as being the chosen bride of a gentleman of good name and family, the story of whose courtship is well-known and regularly narrated to new-comers, and whose visits cause a certain mild flutter of excitement in the dove cote of workers upstairs.

Paul Severne stays on at Mrs. Brown's, where Cressida, now she is gone, is missed more or less by all the establishment, even by those who used not formerly to regard her presence as a particular boon. The two who would have missed her most, the little cripple boy and his "granny," are gone too; the old woman's scanty pittance was reduced by the death of a lady who had made her a small allowance, and she had been com-

pelled to seek even humbler quarters.

There is seldom an empty room at Mrs. Brown's, and their apartment is filled, but Cressida's place remains vacant, and although she could never have been said to be a remarkably useful member of the house, as she seldom did anything she was not requested to do, hard-worked Mrs. Mulveen almost daily laments her absence.

Cressida is happy to-day, and is humming snatches of tunes blithely to herself as her skilful needle darts to and fro. If her prospect in life—being, to marry a penniless gentleman,

“A born Aristocrat, bred Radical,  
And educated Socialist,”

and emigrate with him, second-class, to the wilds of Australia to start life with no capital—would seem to “the wealthy curled darlings of the nation” a thing to be shuddered at, it looks bright enough to her; and

as a familiar step sounds along the passage, she looks up with a quick glad smile, and calls "Come in."

Paul enters—in a light shooting-coat on one of whose cuffs he has been wiping his pen, in a crumpled wide-awake, with one glove on and one off; he looks tired, and flings himself wearily into a chair.

"Still at work, little busy bee?" he says, affectionately. "Here! I've brought you to-day's letters; here's one from Athelyn."

He draws his chair to her side, and putting his arm round her with his accustomed air of quiet tenderness, smiling as he pushes back a straying lock of hair from her brow, he leans over her shoulder to share Athelyn's letter with her. They generally read her letters together. She writes to Cressida those long, essentially feminine epistles wherein gossip and sentiment are prettily and characteristically blended; they are

always intended for Paul's perusal also, and Paul glances through them with a half careless, kindly interest, while Cressida dwells on them with an eager sympathy in every little detail.

On the second page of this letter her eye falls on the name of "Parkhurst," and stops there, half incredulous, half startled. Athelyn's caligraphy is clear and legible; there is no room for doubt as to the name, or as to the profession of the bearer, for the next line particularises him as an artist. Athelyn gives none of the news about him that would have interested her friends; she merely mentions him as staying at the village inn, and as taking a crayon portrait of her; she had not intended to make any allusion to him at all, but had not been able to prevent the beloved name from introducing itself into the letter.

"Parkhurst?" repeated Paul Severne.

“That must be the Harold Parkhurst whom all the Megilp and MacVarnish set think so much of! Taking Athelyn’s portrait, is he?”

“So it seems,” said Cressida.

Her face was bent down over the letter, and hidden from Paul’s sight as he leaned over her shoulder. She wondered that no instinct led him to look into that averted face, which the sight of Parkhurst’s name had set on fire till every vein tingled.

“Well,” said Paul, unsuspectingly, “why don’t you turn the page?”

Her eyes were glued to the letters of that name; it seemed that an hour had passed in the minute since she first saw it; and Paul’s voice at her ear sounded as from a distance.

Fate said to her in that moment, “Speak now—or for ever after hold thy peace!” She had even no need to *speak*; she need



only have turned her face to him ; she knew it would have told its tale. For just a moment she paused ; then she turned the page in silence, and turned a leaf of her future too.

On the last page Athelyn sent a friendly message from her mother, inviting Paul and Cressida to pay a visit to Fern Cottage.

“ Well, shall we go ? ” asked Paul.

Somewhat to his surprise, she did not catch at the invitation delightedly. She only said rather hesitatingly, and looking away from him out of the window,

“ Can we ? ”

“ Of course we can, if you wish it, ” said Paul.

“ I should like it, of course, very much ; but I thought you had so many things on hand to attend to just now ? ”

“ So I have ; but if you would like to have a day with Athelyn before we go, we

will manage to run down there. By-the-by, see here, Cressida, the *Utopia* sails this day four weeks, so we have no time to lose. I had better go to-morrow and see about putting up the banns, hadn't I?" he added, in a business-like tone.

"Well, yes, I suppose so," she said, in an accent quite as practical.

"And you'll get all your things ready in good time?"

"Yes—not that I've much to get ready," she said, smiling, and, conscious that her changing colour had steadied itself, she turned her face to him, but her glance wavered still.

"Good child! How cold and damp your little hand is!"

"But yours is burning! Why, Paul, your hand is in a fever. Are you well?"

"Not very. I have had a splitting headache all day—over-work, I suppose; and I

have plenty more to do yet ; but one gets very tired sometimes."

"Yes," she said, with a sort of impatient, agitated sigh. "So tired—so tired even of thinking—tired even of hoping sometimes."

"Why, Cressida?—it's a new thing for you to be tired of hope."

"I did not mean that exactly—only the transition time is feverish. One longs to pull the future near."

"It's coming fast enough. I'll put up the banns to-morrow, and in four weeks we'll be on the sea."

"Yes," she agreed, but with another irrepressible, stifled sigh, that seemed as much of pain as hope. "Only four weeks ! Four weeks will soon pass. But, Paul, how ill you look !" she added, glancing more attentively at him. "Your eyes are as hollow as if you had not slept for weeks, and your forehead burns."

Paul smiled, gratified by her anxiety. Cressida, sweet and childlike as she was, was not ordinarily demonstrative—to him, at least.

“It’s nothing, little one,” he said. “But keep your hand there—it’s so cool. I must rest, I think; it would never do for me to be ill when there’s so much to be done.”

In the garden of Fern Cottage the two happy lovers—happier as yet than those we leave in dusty London—are sitting. They are on opposite benches, a state of things which never happens unless Harold is making a sketch of Athelyn. Thus, accordingly, he is sketching her now. Looking at her, he has been quoting those lines of Browning’s, beginning—

“If one could have that little head of hers  
Painted upon a background of pale gold—”

He has got the light he wants, the sun-

shine striking through the boughs on the side he requires it; he has arranged her, head and hand, in the *pose* he chooses, and she has been patiently "sitting" for an hour till her limbs feel stiff and numb.

It is an idealised Athelyn that he sees in his mind's eye look out from the picture he will paint from this sketch. A warmer glow in the cool dark shadows of her hair, more chiselled perfection of each fair individual feature, a deeper dream in the velvet-soft eyes, a more southern mellowness on the faintly-tinged ivory of her cheek. Yet it will be Athelyn's very self, with just that glamour over her in which to him, lover and artist, she appears clad in his dreams.

After all she needs but little idealising, this latest love of his—else perhaps he would not have been passably faithful for more than a whole year long, in absence

and in presence, from golden June even to the end of ripe July.

“There comes Anne with the letters,” he observes. “Now, woman’s curiosity ! your eyes are glancing round already ! I suppose I can’t ask you to sit still now that the post is in ?”

“No, it’s well you don’t ask the impossible,” she answers, gaily ; and, woman-like, adds appealingly, “I *may* move now, may I not ?” before stirring a hand.

Anne arrives with the post-budget, only two letters. Athelyn smiles as she looks at the writing of the one, and puts it by, as one always reserves the most welcome of the packet, while she opens the other. This is nothing, a mere invitation, upon which she comments briefly, “Can’t go,” and then turns to open the reserved one.

“Oh ! poor dear Paul !” she says, with a look and tone of affectionate concern,

as she runs her eye down the first page.

“What’s up? and who’s poor dear Paul?” inquires Harold Parkhurst, who is leisurely putting up his pencils and replacing some sketches in his portfolio.

“Surely I’ve told you about our old friend Paul Severne, haven’t I? I have known him all my life; he is like a brother to me. And he is ill, poor boy; the doctor says he is afraid it is typhoid fever. It is so especially sad for him to be taken ill just now. Poor little Cressida!”

“Cressida?” Harold repeated, looking up with some interest. “Who’s Cressida?—his sister?”

“Sister? no! she is engaged to him. They are going out to Australia when they are married,” she continued, narratively. “Paul is not well off, you know, and so——”

“I did not know! how was I to know?”

does his name bear the stamp of poverty?" he interposed, lightly. "And if he is not well off, why does he marry?"

"Well," said Athelyn, vaguely, and taken aback, "I suppose—because he likes her—is it not a good reason?"

"Passable, as reasons go! Why does she marry him then?"

"For the same good reason—I believe," she replied, adding the last clause on a conscientious impulse. "They are going out to Australia to work their way together; they were to have been married almost immediately and sail early next month; but now I suppose this illness of his will postpone it and upset all their plans. I am *so* sorry," she adds, sincerely, her bright face grave with sympathy.

"What did you say the young lady's name was?" he asked.

"Cressida. An uncommon name, isn't



it? I never remember hearing it before."

"Oh, it's not so uncommon as all that. I've heard it."

"Have you? Who was it? Perhaps it was the same? but no, I don't see how it could be."

"Quite impossible, I should think," he rejoined, decidedly, not to say brusquely.

"Who was *your* Cressida?" she inquired, innocently.

"*My* Cressida!" he repeated, with a half impatient forced smile. "Oh, a girl I once saw in—America!"

"Ah! Our Cressida has never been out of England. It is rather a romantic story, hers and Paul's. Is it not *too* sad, his being seized with such a serious illness just now of all times?"

"Tiresome—yes; illnesses are generally inopportune," he assented, somewhat indif-

ferently, and stooping carelessly to pick up the envelope of Cressida's letter.

Hers was one of those common, second-rate running handwritings, of which there are hundreds as similar as peas in the same pod, yet the very commonness of it was somehow unsatisfactory to Harold Parkhurst.

He did not seem to take much interest in the subject of Paul and Cressida—indeed, if Athelyn could at that stage of her illusion have seen a flaw in her hero, she would have thought him a trifle unsympathetic—although he heard a good deal about them at that time. Mrs. Hastings and Athelyn were naturally very frequently referring to them, wondering how dear Paul was going on, proposing to send hampers of wine and jelly, writing affectionate letters of inquiry, and so on. Without asking a question, or even testifying a degree more interest than the

barest concession to politeness demanded, Harold heard enough passing allusions to Paul and Cressida and their circumstances to perceive that whether or not Paul, with his long pedigree and short purse, was an eligible mate for Cressida, Cressida, evidently, fond as Mrs. Hastings and Athelyn seemed of her, was not in a worldly point of view to be regarded as a match for Paul.

The little that he gathered and pieced together from passing words concerning Cressida, stimulated his curiosity. He wondered sometimes about her, and asked himself half incredulously, "Could it be?" But he never asked a question of Athelyn, who would have been only too glad to talk about Paul and Cressida, if he had manifested any sympathy or interest in the subject.

## CHAPTER VI.

## IN STORM AND SUNSHINE.

When we most need rest and the perfect sleep,  
 Some hand will reach from the dark, and keep  
 The curtains drawn and the pillows tossed  
 Like a tide of foam ; and one will say  
 At night—oh, heaven, that it were day !  
 And one by night through the misty tears  
 Will say—oh, heaven, the days are years,  
 And I would to heaven that the waves were crossed !

JOAQUIN MILLER.

**I**LLNESSES and accidents, as Harold Parkhurst philosophically observed, are generally inopportune, but seldom did disease make its spring at a more inopportune moment than the fever which struck Paul Severne down just before he touched the

threshold of the new future which was opening before him and Cressida.

It was night; they had drawn the curtains close to shut the moonlight out of the room where he lay, for when it fell upon his face he moaned and tossed in the heavy yet untranquil sleep induced by an opiate draught. But the Queen of Night would not be altogether shut out. With one slight silver hand she stretched in through the drawn curtains and pointed long, bright fingers across the floor, and mixed with the flickering of the night-lamp on Cressida's face.

She was sharing the vigil of the Sister of Mercy who was sleeping in a big arm-chair in the corner. The doctor had recommended this arrangement; looking at Cressida's fragile form and girlish face he had suggested that she did not seem strong enough to undertake the entire duties of nursing in

an illness which threatened to be long and serious. So as no one in Mrs. Brown's household could spare sufficient time for the office, Sister Agnes was sent for and arrived with her bag. Cressida sometimes looked at her with curiosity, and marvelled how it could be that her homely round face, under the hideous stiff, white cap, retained its plumpness of outline and freshness of colour in the life she led—questioned, was it life at all? had Sister Agnes ever *lived*?—had she been born a machine to shake up pillows and mix draughts, or had personal joys and sorrows ever touched her?

Cressida, however, absorbed in her own anxieties, gave little time to speculations about her fellow-nurse, but as a rule simply accepted her as a useful piece of furniture, wondered a little at her cheerfulness, pitied her in a general way, and yet this night somehow half envied her comfortable somnolence

and healthy composure. Left wakeful to her own thoughts, as she sat watching by Paul's uneasy sleep, she was musing over and re-reading another letter of Athelyn's—a letter full of love and sympathy and anxious inquiries, but still into which Harold Parkhurst's name managed to introduce itself. It was only a casual allusion; no word of any special interest attached to it; but there was the name. And the name to Cressida was like one of those magic spells that called up a thousand black-winged birds and bats and things of evil omen to obscure the air with the flap of their murky wings. Into her soul all dark thoughts crowded and fluttered and shut out the light.

She felt like one who, with his foot on the deck of the vessel that is to bear him to freedom and peace, feels a heavy hand on his shoulder arrest him and drag him back to the shore where the prison-gates are

waiting to close upon him. A week ago! and all life had looked so fair to her. She had little fear of poverty, never having known anything else; she had no dread of honest work, with Paul by her side. She was only full of eager hopes and joyful confidence in the promise of the new future that spread before her. Now suddenly it seemed to recede like a mirage; she could see it shining still, but far, how far away! But a week ago, and that fair broad future, with all its boundless vistas, seemed her own; she had panted to set sail to take possession of it—to turn her back for ever on the city that had been a cruel step-mother to her; had rejoiced that every link between her and her past was snapt, that no thread remained to bind her back to the bygone days.

Now she seemed to feel the fetters of that past close upon her wrists; in vain she re-



coiled and strove to shake them off; now old memories swept down upon her like a pack let loose, and shouted and laughed and mocked, "Aha, you thought to forget!" And with aroused recollections awoke foreboding and fear; the smiling future frowned as the shadow of the past fell on it. Now Paul, her hope, her faith, upon whom all that future hung, lay near to the Valley of the Shadow of Death. She could not go to him with *this* trouble—to him on whom hitherto she had so safely felt she could lay all her burdens. She had a secret to keep from him now; she watched by him with a thought he must not guess at her heart. And the weeks would pass, were passing, and on the day when they should have been on the sea, he would still lie stricken and helpless here—unless indeed a worse contingency, that she did not dare to contemplate, came to pass.

As this thought crossed her mind, she turned in trembling anxiety to see that he slept still, that no fateful change was on his face. So, too sickeningly anxious to admit even to herself her fears for him—fears that perhaps in reality were chiefly for herself as her fate hinged on him, chained by his bedside, while burning to shake the dust of London from her feet, she waited—feeling as if the bloodhounds she deemed she had escaped were baying on her track again; sat still, while her soul fretted and chafed. The moonbeams irritated her with their coolness. How heavily Sister Agnes slept! what an easy conscience she must have to sleep so sound!

Down in the country the same midnight moon looked upon Athelyn's window, and peered in through the lace curtains. One ray, leaving the sleeping landscape steeped

in lovely light outside, stole in and laid a cold kiss on Athelyn's cheek, haloed with its wonderful white radiance the fair face that was bright with the soul's joy, and touched with a pale gleam her clasped hands as she prayed,

“God help me to be worthy of my Harold's love !”

She saw no flaw in her idol yet; none of the gilt was rubbed off the clay image she had set up and worshipped as fine gold.

Once an old French lady, a woman of the world, with a great store of worldly knowledge, sharpened by a marvellous insight into character, put up her glasses and surveyed Harold Parkhurst with her keen old eyes, that had never outworn their cat-like penetration.

“Il y a un soupçon de brutalité dans cet homme,” was her verdict. “Mais c'est un homme qui sera aimé.”

Athelyn, sitting by silently, listened with indignant astonishment. She knew well how true was the last clause, but the amount of truth in the first she did not suspect. Translated, the expression sounds too strong, but, as the old Frenchwoman put it, it conveys a very fair idea of one of the darker streaks in Harold Parkhurst's nature. Moreover, the keen-sighted old lady intended a link between the two clauses of her sentence, which Athelyn did not perceive. Woman in the early summer bloom of her loving season does not see what woman looking back across the fiery sword into her Fool's Paradise can realise. It is just the man in whom there lurks that "*soupçon de brutalité*" who is most passionately loved. That streak of possible cruelty, in the eyes of the woman who loves him, seems only a phase of strength.

It was so with Athelyn. Sometimes she

observed in her lover a vein of bitterness, of cynicism and mistrust, which half pained, half fascinated her, and which she attributed, perhaps rightly enough, to the circumstances of his parentage and early life. She remembered the conflicting theories as to "who and what" he was which were under discussion one morning at Lakeside; she repeated to herself Mrs. Archer's story of Lord Brantyre and the Spanish planter's daughter. Harold was born in Cuba, she knew, and from occasional words he dropped, and still more from their rarity, and from the general silence he preserved on the subject of his family, she became convinced that this was the true account, as, indeed, it was. Once he said to her,

"You know I've no family circle to introduce you to. You'll come in for no brothers and sisters, and uncles and aunts-in-law."

And another time, in a graver mood, in one of the few rare and brief expansions of confidence that she ever had to recollect in him, he began suddenly—

“I should like to believe in a next world, to think that my mother could see you, Athelyn. She had not much happiness on earth, poor soul. She had only me to think of, and I was more anxiety than happiness to her always. But I like to think she sees us two. It’s the one thing in my life I wish her to look down on.”

Harold was a bundle of inconsistencies, but Athelyn only saw the best side of them. He revered *her*; he cherished his mother’s memory as that of an angel, yet thought half lightly, half sceptically, of women in general. Deep in his heart he nursed a never-dying sombre resentment on the score of his mother’s sorrows, thought of her always as basely wronged, and while

resenting *her* injury, was yet himself utterly unscrupulous in his conduct to other women with hearts as warm to love and suffer as hers had been. He found a certain satisfaction in writing down his own sins to his unacknowledged father's account, on the principle that

“ There's not a crime

But takes its proper change out still in crime,

If once rung on the counter of this world.

Let sinners look to 't !”

One clear breezy evening he sat with Athelyn looking on the sunset. They had walked up to the top of a hill, which was said to command the best view of all the neighbourhood for miles around, and were sitting on a rustic bench which some unknown benefactor had thoughtfully provided, so that the weary aspirants who had climbed for the view, might enjoy their landscape in peace.

There had been heavy clouds piled up

ominously in the sky all the afternoon; but as the day declined a great rent was torn across from north to south, and through that cleft all the ruddy golden fire of sunset broke and blazed, and melted in its flames the uppermost of the shattered clouds till they severed and floated away in fragments up into the blue heavens above. It seemed that those stray shapeless clouds, which caught the flush of the sinking sun, took form as they drifted; some were like great strange couchant animals sleeping, some like rosy-winged birds. They winged their way up higher and higher, while lower down the shreds of the royal purple that had veiled the west were lost in the rising sea of golden flame.

“It looks as if the gates of Heaven were thrown open,” said Athelyn, dreamily, peacefully, as one in a safe harbour of rest. Harold’s arm was round her, and he was



looking down with softened eyes upon her pure and fragile lily-like loveliness.

“You are fit to walk through those gates, my good angel!” he said. “I wonder, would you? You would not turn away from me, leave me out in the cold, and enter Heaven alone?”

Her answer was not given in words. Only she nestled closer to his side, and her eyes turned from the glories of the sunset and clung to his face, as her soul would turn from joy to cling to his.

“I think I have found my heaven on earth!” she said, presently, softly as a dream, with such a sigh as keeps the weight of a great joy from overburdening the heart to breaking. “Now that you love me, Harold, and I love you, I feel as if this earth *were* Heaven!”

“My Athelyn! my purest and truest! There is one good thing written to my

account then, if I have made you happy! Is it really so, darling? It seems strange to me—you are an angel, and I—have *I* made *you* happy?”

“Happy? Oh, Harold, am I profane to say it? Or is it only that we measure Heaven by our highest and purest joy here? It may be that my mortal imagination can’t soar high enough to take in immortal joys. But I can’t picture to myself a joy in Heaven more deep and perfect than I find here with you, while you love me!”

“*While* I love you? Are you already limiting my love, sweet? Do you doubt me then?”

“Doubt? I could as soon doubt myself as you. Oh, my darling, if I doubted you I should pray to die! And now, *now* it seems that all my life ought to pass on my knees in thanking God for his great goodness to me!”

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE BAROMETER BEGINS TO FALL.

Between the sunset and the sea,  
 My love laid hands and lips on me ;  
 Of sweet came sour ; of day came night ;  
 Of long desire came brief delight !  
 Ah, Love ! and what thing came of thee  
 Between the sea-downs and the sea ?

Between the sea-mark and the sea,  
 Joy grew to grief, grief grew to me ;  
 Love turned to tears, and tears to fire,  
 And dead delight to new desire.  
 Love's talk, Love's touch, there seemed to be  
 Between the sea-sand and the sea.

SWINBURNE.

WHEN and how did the first little cloud  
 begin to drift across the perfect  
 heaven of Athelyn's felicity ? She herself

could scarcely have defined exactly. Perhaps the very first faint speck in the sky arose when it became evident that Harold Parkhurst, like most other human beings, was the possessor of a temper. This would have been no more worth calling a discovery than the fact that he had eyes and a nose, if it had not manifested itself comparatively early in the season. Men generally keep their temper like an evil genie imprisoned down in a secret jar until the cabalistic formula of matrimony sets it free.

There was nothing particularly aggravating or alarming about this temper of Harold Parkhurst's; he was on the whole an easy enough individual to get on with, as mortals go; but he could speak sharply and brusquely, could be morosely cold or capriciously impatient, according to mood. On Athelyn's sensitive nature an impatient look, a hasty word, fell almost like a blow;

and it caused her about equal proportions of distress and wonder when she found that Harold could give such looks and words—and that was just as soon as he grew accustomed to Athelyn's society, and the charm of novelty and freshness about their love wore off.

It is an hour that must come to all lovers. Even Athelyn, sensitive and dreamy as she was, was not so fanciful as to dream the time would never come when romance must merge into reality. Only with *her* the hour would strike late. The dew was yet on the roses, the sunrise still in the sky, to her. It was not to her alone that the freshness and romance of love were sweet; to Harold they were so sweet that he set the cup to his lips over-thirstily—and drained it over-soon!

Yet this first little cloud, the discovery of the possibility of jarring, and of differences

too slight to be called lovers' quarrels, did not come between Harold and Athelyn, or estrange them one whit. If anything, she loved him rather more than less for finding he was but mortal. Nor was the discovery on her side alone. He found a very human little woman, with a spirit easily dashed—a quick little temper easily ruffled for the moment. I say “a *little* temper” advisedly. He never saw her moved to real anger, never to sullenness, never to persistent fretfulness. Only just now and then a transient breeze of petulance would break her sweetness, at first. Very soon all these childish April gusts died away. Athelyn loved too well ever to be trying to the man she loved. And the real love between her and Harold no hasty word or passing mood ever touched. They only came to the path that lies before all lovers, when they find each other mortal man and mortal woman, with

whims to forbear and moods to endure.

The second cloud cast its first shadow across the sky when Harold, awakening a little from his dream and coming back to considerations of real life, began to think of money, began to review his position, to deliberate with himself upon his chances of sufficient success to warrant him in contemplating matrimony, and to weigh the pros and cons of such a step. He really loved Athelyn very dearly; she was the only woman he had ever perfectly trusted and revered as well as loved, the only woman in the world he wished to be his wife, and if his prospects had been steady and certain instead of shifting and fitful, his dearest wish would have been to marry her immediately.

But he depended entirely upon his art, and Art to a man devoted to her for her own sake, without any regard to the ways

and means by which the world expects such devotion to be manifested, is but a capricious mistress in her dole of the world's gifts. Harold Parkhurst painted in his own way and at his own time, would not be tied to day or month, and would slash his knife across the canvas, if his nearly-completed work did not please him ; painted whatever subject struck his fancy, and treated it according to his own ideas, regardless whether it would sell or would remain on the studio walls ; loved his art more devotedly than he loved any human creature, and had a profound scorn for men who treated their genius as a marketable commodity. He shrugged his shoulders when he saw Dick Vandyke leaving his highest essay in the highest line of Art on the easel, while he painted "pot-boilers" to give the children a change to the sea-side ; he lifted his eyebrows in contemptuous



compassion as for an amiable imbecile when young MacVarnish accepted a commission from a third-rate illustrated paper, that meant hard work and no honour, to save up to prepare a home for the bride who was waiting for him.

Harold had always hugged himself on his free and happy state. Now he thought he would be happier with Athelyn than alone, if it had not been for the alarming visions that rose before him—visions of butcher's bills and gas rates, of unknown horrors that might face him under the name of household responsibilities, of clanking chains of domestic duty rattling after him, and, worse than all, of possible mute reproaches in Athelyn's eyes, if she found the battle of life too hard for her, frail flower that she was. Spoken reproaches he would probably not have minded much, and the more voluble they were, the less they would have

touched him. But he did not like the idea of some day reading in her look a vain regret that she had given up all for him.

He knew that, utterly dependent as he was on caprices of fortune, the life he had to offer her might possibly be but a constant struggle with the opposing demons of Poverty and Appearance. For himself, he was tolerably indifferent as to whether the world went well or ill with him, so long as he satisfied himself, while his hand had not lost its cunning, his eye its accuracy, or his brain its creative power. He had always "got on" somehow, and seldom more than got on; he had never been actually in want, and very seldom out of debt. But whether he was in debt or out of debt did not matter much to him; he was by nature thoughtless, and by habit extravagant, and the length of the unpaid bills he tossed carelessly into his desk without a second

glance did not affect him so long as he had a handful of loose silver in his pocket and a picture on his easel. But he came now to question with himself whether a man once married *could* pitch all his responsibilities into a dusty desk-drawer out of sight.

He did not expound his reflections exhaustively to Athelyn, but she began to perceive their drift. He would sit moodily and absently by her side sometimes; he would observe vaguely that "things looked cloudy and he didn't well see his way;" he would glance at her pretty, fresh fashionable dresses with half admiration and half a discontented doubtfulness.

"I should hate to see a woman looking dowdy and shabby!" he burst out once, with emphatic sincerity. "I'm like Earl Doorm, 'I love that beauty should go beautifully!' And if I had been Enid I wouldn't have married Geraint in faded silk."

"I am glad, because I don't like faded silk myself!" said Athelyn with her soft laugh; "and I don't want you to adopt Geraint's sentiments on that or any other subject. But I thought the other day you were singing the praises of 'sweet neglect—robes loosely flowing, hair as free—' and so on?"

"So I was; but to be sweet the neglect must be with a method. There's grace in that kind of ordered disorder that's for beauty's sake. But the disorder of poverty is always squalid and hideous."

Another day when Athelyn made some sympathetic observation about somebody who was in some distress, he rejoined, with one of his unmirthful smiles,

"Trouble! What do *you* know of trouble, little one?"

"Of my own experience, little—nothing."

But one lives, and *sees*. And sorrow is always so near us all! Even if it never touches us, it is always close at our side, before, behind, all round us. Why! from birth to death, through all our happiest days, there's never an hour when some trouble is not at our very gates—only, thank Heaven! it doesn't always knock and enter."

"I wonder what sorrow is at *your* gates now, that you are thinking of it so?" he said, looking down at her with the gentleness in which a world-wise man would listen to a little child prattling of the world.

"I don't know—none in particular, I hope," she answered. "But while we love, and those we love are mortal, there must always be a sea of troubles ready to break all round us, though we walk among them so safely and happily sometimes. I think, Harold, life is like a sword-dance," she add-

ed, half smiling, "we are always treading close among possible stabs."

"Yes," he agreed, moodily, and somewhat abstractedly. "Sometimes I think," he added, "that trouble was set on your track the day I came to you."

"Why, Harold? And if it were, do you think I should grudge it?"

"God knows I would not hurt or grieve you wilfully, my Athelyn! And yet I *shall* be a trouble to you! I shall bring you trouble if I marry you—I shall leave you sorrow if I don't."

"What do you mean?" she asked, with soft earnest eyes, trying to read through his look into his soul.

"Well, perhaps I am mistaken. Would my giving you up be a sorrow to you?"

"Harold?" she questioned, her eyes still seeking the true spirit of his words in his picturesque inscrutable face.

“I think it would, little one—I think it would. I do believe you care for me—more than I deserve.”

“Why should you talk of giving me up? What is there that should part us? Tell me, Harold, what are you thinking of?”

“Thinking of you, child, in your happy peaceful life—with the fair future before you—all the bright prospects that I may blight for you. Thinking that I have no right to dream of marrying you—I a poor Bohemian—you born and bred on rose-leaves. What right have I to let you tread a thorny path for my sake?”

“Do you not know that I would rather take thorns from your hand than roses from any other man’s? I do not care whether you are rich or poor, Harold. I am not afraid.”

“You are a child—an unworldly child!” he said, almost harshly, yet clasping closely

the soft hand that lay at home in his. He looked down into her fair troubled earnest face, and for a moment was silent. Then he took her in his arms, and pressed her to his breast with a sudden passion of half reluctant tenderness. "Yes, you are an unworldly, unreasoning child!" he repeated. "And you are one of the angels upon earth to whom a man gives all his best self and none of his worst. You are the purest star that ever shone on my life—you are my heart's own darling. And I can't give you up, my Athelyn; your love is too sweet to me!"

Thus Harold Parkhurst wavered now, between moods in which it seemed to him that he could not and would not lose Athelyn, that, prudent or imprudent, he must have her for his own—and moods in which he questioned whether he could offer her such a life as would suffice for her happi-



ness. It was this way that he framed the question to himself; but the real question was—could he make her happy without interfering with his own freedom and his devotion to art in his own way?

To sacrifice all else for her, to clip the wings of his genius and tame it to money-getting ends for her sake, was just the one course of which Harold Parkhurst never thought. Love might be the grace and ornament of his life, might even attain at its highest to being his Sunday shrine after working-days; but the mainspring and motive power of a nature like his Love could never be.

In his sanguine moods he dwelt strongly on the fact that there could be no cause for immediate anxiety even if he decided to marry that very autumn, owing to the fact that once in his life he had done a prudent thing; at least, *he* thought it was a prudent

thing, though several of his friends thought, and told him, quite the contrary. That once, when by a windfall of golden luck he had found himself in what to him seemed affluence, he had invested a few hundreds in the Kamouraska Mining Company, and, wonderful to relate, had left the money there ever since. It brought in rather high interest, and he had vague ideas of some day taking a hand in the great game of finance and making a fortune, so he left bills unpaid and went his careless way, leaving his money in Kamouraska bonds. It was not a large amount, but it would be enough to set him and Athelyn afloat just at first. And afterwards? Ah, there was the rub! When it was spent he would stand just as he stood now, with the weight of a responsibility shackling him—and responsibility was Harold Parkhurst's bugbear.

So as the full zenith of the summer waned, Athelyn's full orb of happiness waned and dwindled too. Her early confident joy had faded into hope and suspense; now slowly the hope was flickering lower, the suspense growing more and more feverish; and very slowly the possibility of being parted from Harold—which at first had seemed like a nameless, formless cloud—was taking shape and darkening into a living fear. Now too there dawned upon her vaguely the consciousness of there being some flaw of weakness in her hero. She shut her eyes from seeing it; she turned away from her own perception; she never admitted even to herself that it existed, but yet she recognised a weakness somewhere in the nature she had deemed so strong. Was it weakness of love? or of will? was it a failure in faith or in courage? She did not know; she would not allow herself to

think. And, weak or strong, he was her idol always.

His love was not like hers, and yet he loved her well in his way. Sometimes, when he was in a sanguine humour, they were as purely happy together as if no shade had ever dimmed their glowing horizon of hope; they would build castles in the air together, picture a home that they would share, map out an ideal future of work and love. Only gradually it had ceased to be "*When* we two are together," and come to "*If*!"

It was always "*If*" both ways now, *if* for hopes, and *if* for fears; and all earth sometimes seemed to be shifting quicksands under Athelyn's feet.

"If we were to part, Athelyn," he said one day, "some other man would be seeking you directly I turned my back. Perhaps he is hanging about now, watching,

waiting to slip into my shoes. I wonder whether you would marry him?"

"I don't know. What would it matter?" she said, wearily. It did not seem to her as if anything mattered that was not Harold.

"Would you *love* him?" he persisted.

"Does one's heart sprout and sprout afresh like the hydra's head?" she answered, with a touch of bitterness very rare in her.

"Don't love again, Athelyn!" he said, impulsively, masterfully. "Once I could have been generous—once I could have left you free and said 'Only be happy!' But now the mood moves me to say, 'Be true to me!'"

"I *shall* be true," she answered, not exultingly nor protestingly, but with something of a sad foreknowledge in her tones.

"Yes I know, and you know, that your constancy to me may be at the cost of your own happiness."

“A price I’ll pay,” she murmured, softly, unreproachfully, if something sorrowfully, as she bowed her head upon his breast. “I don’t say that you give me all happiness now, Harold. But you are more than happiness to me.”

“You don’t tell me that I am a selfish brute,” he said, fondly, self-reproachfully. “And yet—I am.”

“Don’t!” she said, looking up and laying her hand on his lips. “I would not hear thine enemy say so! I won’t even hear yourself!”

Yet Harold Parkhurst was not far from the truth in his estimate of himself, though probably he would have been disappointed if she had agreed with him.

He was often in London at this season; he went and came erratically as the mood moved him. The time was drawing near when the Hastings family were to leave

England on their autumn and winter trip to the south, and sometimes in hopeful humour he talked vaguely of going with them. By slow degrees there came to be a sort of tacit understanding or presumption that, if he did join them and make one of the party to the Continent, all would be well; it would be a sign that the path was smooth, and that their union was only a question of time. If not—Athelyn did not phrase the alternative even in solitary self-communion, but she saw it plainly enough. And still, however clearly she saw the possibility, she could never realise what a life without Harold would be. Eighteen months ago it might have been a difficulty for her to realise how utterly and absorbingly one human creature could fill the whole scope of another's life. Now it was more than difficult, it was impossible, to picture to herself life emptied of that element which

seemed not only to fill, but to *be* all life.

There came days when people watched, with more or less anxiety, according to their stake therein, the great machine of finance, and noticing ominous shivers and jerks, wondered tremblingly which wheel would stop, which spring would be the first to snap. Then Athelyn Hastings, for the first time in her life, took to studying the money-market, and following with eager eye the varying but sinking fortunes of the Kamouraska Mining Company. People were selling, getting rid of their shares at any cost ; but Harold Parkhurst, sanguine at the time when he should have been cautious, and cautious when he had better have been sanguine, let the last moment for selling slip.

Then came a morning when, as Athelyn ran her eye down the columns of the paper, she became aware that her mother was



watching her with concealed anxiety, and the next moment read, "Failure of the Kamouraska Mining Company." Neither mother nor daughter made any comment; Athelyn looked blankly across to the opposite wall, and Mrs. Hastings looked uncomfortably at Athelyn, and Jim scratched her sleeve with inquisitive forepaw unnoticed, only presently she said quietly, as if thinking aloud,

"I wonder if there will be a letter from Harold to-day?"

But no letter came; Harold characteristically left her to her own conjectures, and made no sign beyond sending her a newspaper with an article on the "Great Kamouraskan Failure," marked with a red ink cross.

There was silence for a few days, then a brief, vague, gloomy letter in which the only glimmer of hope—the only glimmer,

indeed, of any purport at all, was that "perhaps he might run down to see her soon."

Then one day Athelyn's eye was caught by a paragraph in the paper headed, "Serious Illness of Lord Brantyre," which set forth how that noble lord lay at his family seat in Hampshire suffering from a complaint from which it was to be feared there could be no recovery.

"Things come not in single spies, but in battalions," she said, laying down the paper with a sigh rather of excitement and suspense than of distress.

In her present state of mind it mattered very little to her whether all the peers of the United Kingdom lived or died, so long as their life or death did not affect Harold Parkhurst. But she knew the story of his birth, and wondered if the life or death of Lord Brantyre could make any difference to him?

The failure of the Kamouraskans, she knew in her heart, had struck a blow at the very root of all her hopes. Was it possible that this other impending catastrophe would strike the final blow and cut love and joy adrift from her? or could there lurk in it any hidden glimmer of hope?

It was curious that while Harold and Athelyn, with all their wide diversity of character, were only alike in a certain unworldliness of thought, she, by far the most unworldly, simple-hearted, and romantic of the two, was watching far more eagerly than he, eagerly as a miser watches for gain, for any chance of his advancement.

He wrote to her again, telling her little more than the fact that he was in the country for a few days; the letter bore a Hampshire post-mark; he had evidently written hurriedly, with a sort of characteristic intentional vagueness, and in spirits

apparently rather perturbed and unquiet than despondent. Athelyn, studying his few hasty lines, felt in her heart that whatever the crisis was to be, it was drawing near; and in her heart's most secret depths was conscious of the faint flutter of a hope that hid itself as a thing guilty and ashamed—that on Lord Brantyre's decease hung one last chance for Harold and for her.

The next item in the paper that drew her attention was—

“We regret to announce the decease of Lord Brantyre, which took place yesterday at Brantyre Hall in Hampshire. The lamented nobleman was in the sixty-seventh year of his age. He married the Honourable Alicia Chetwynd, and leaves issue Blanche, married to Sir Talbot Whyte, and George Albert, who succeeds him.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

## A MEETING AND A PARTING.

O more than one and more than two  
The sorrow of this shall see !

ROSSETTI.

**D**URING all this time that the summer was waning and the clouds driving darker and darker across the day of love that had dawned so rosily, Athelyn had not seen Paul and Cressida. Paul had been imprisoned in his room ; his illness had been long and serious ; and Cressida of course had been his constant and devoted attendant.

Although they had not met, there had

been a tolerably brisk correspondence between them, long and anxious and loving letters of inquiry on Athelyn's side; briefer and more rambling and equally affectionate answers from Cressida, answers not always strictly grammatical—and occasionally, with some of the hard words which she had grown rather fond of employing, mis-spelt—but sweet and womanly letters all the same.

Now that Paul was better, plans for the marriage and move which had been compulsorily postponed were on the *tapis* again. The vessel in which they were to have sailed had gone long ago, and the unforeseen expenses of Paul's illness had swallowed up the little fund he had scraped together for their modest start in life; but now that he was getting strong again, they were going to pick up the thread of their scheme where it had been broken off.

They were invited to go down and stay at Fern Cottage for a few days, before Mrs. Hastings and Athelyn left it for the season and went on their way to Nice. Paul was a little puzzled by Cressida's manner concerning this invitation; there was a lack of the eagerness to avail herself of it, the demonstrative delight in the prospect, which he had anticipated. He, however, noticed it but slightly, and ended by setting it down to her amiable anxiety for *him* and loving care lest he should fatigue or over-exert himself. She had been the most devoted of nurses. Weariness had been unknown to her; her tender hand had been ever skilful to smooth his pillow, her light foot quick to speed on every errand, her smile ever ready to cheer, her soft voice to sympathise. Ever patient with invalid's petulance, compliant with convalescent whims, she appeared to Paul in the light of a

ministering angel; he was glad when the dutiful and practical attentions of Sister Agnes were deemed no longer needful, and he was left to Cressida's care alone.

There was no doubt in his mind as to her affection for him, no room for doubt of it in the eye of any looker-on. It was with anxiety almost despairing that she had hung over him when the doctor's face was grave—with a passion of gratitude that was almost anguish, she had knelt and thanked Heaven when he was pronounced out of danger.

Paul Severne was not only her true lover to her; he was all her future, all her life; she leant on his love for strength and safety. He was the best and noblest man she had ever known, and she looked up to his truth, clung to his faith, followed him with an implicit reliance which deeply touched him, seeming in his eyes as it did the reliance of pure love.



It was at the time that Athelyn read the tidings of Lord Brantyre's death that Paul and Cressida came to Monksfield—on a brief visit only of a day or two—and the three friends met together again.

They were glad to meet; they were united as closely as ever by the unbroken bonds of the old affection, still somehow it now was

“Like the same, yet not the same—  
Like, unlike, evermore.”

Paul, the only one who *looked* at all changed, being a little weaker, thinner, paler, was the only one really unaltered. The two girls were each conscious of some faint and unaccountable, undefinable change, subtle and all but imperceptible; and each, uncomprehending, wondered—was it in herself or in the other? and each, pondering, gave answer to her own heart, “It is I, not she—I who am holding my secret from her,

I who look on all things with different eyes now ; it is I who must be changed !”

Athelyn kept her secret, and never told a word of her own love-story. If they had met a month ago, she would probably have confided it to Cressida and opened her whole heart to her. But *now*—now that she was waiting to see what sign Harold would make next—now that she felt, by foreboding more than by reason, the nets of a destiny that was to part her from him closing—closing round her—now that each hour that passed without him struck on her heart like a knell, now she shrank from uttering his name. Moreover, there was to her in the sight of Paul and Cressida—who seemed to be rather drawn together than driven apart by adverse circumstances, who bent their way bravely hand-in-hand in the teeth of the storm—an unnamed secret pain. With a silent, bitter sense of contrast, which

she struggled vainly to banish, but which malignantly forced itself upon her, she looked at Paul, who, for Cressida's sake, would have deemed no sacrifice short of honour too great; who openly and freely gave all he had, and while frankly regretting that it was not more, never sought to take back the gift on the ground of its unworthiness. This perception of a contrast that she hated to be compelled to see, yet to which she could not be blind, was an additional padlock on the secrecy she instinctively preserved on the subject of Harold Parkhurst.

Cressida on her part was no more likely to broach the subject than Athelyn. Her thoughts were full of the name that was always burning at her lips, hovering ready for utterance, yet never uttered. She made none of the allusions or inquiries concerning him that might so naturally have come

from her, having heard of him through Athelyn's letters. Once or twice, careless words slipping casually from Mrs. Hastings, would have given her the opportunity of comment or question; but the opportunity always passed and was lost.

Before coming to Monksfield she had lain hour after hour at night sleeplessly wondering—Was he still there? From the fact that his name had lately entirely dropped out of Athelyn's letters, she imagined that he must have left the neighbourhood. When she arrived there, seeing and hearing nothing of him, she concluded that this impression was correct, and that he was safely off the scene. A question would have set her anxiety at rest; but she never asked it. Thus on both sides his name was banished with a jealous reserve.

One day when they were in the garden, not dreaming that he was near, the object

of their thoughts, those thoughts of which neither had breathed a syllable to the other, was quietly walking from the station towards Fern Cottage. As he had often done, instead of passing along the lane round to the front-door and ringing the visitor's bell, he stopped on the side of the grounds nearest the station, unlatched the orchard gate and walked in. Collie, who was lying at the gate with his nose through the bars, on the watch for the rare passers-by, greeted him with friendly tail and too demonstrative paws, escorted him—varying his pace with suddenly affectionate sideways bounds, that left mementoes in the shape of sandy paw-marks on his coat—half across the orchard, then, evidently thinking he had done his duty in the way of hospitality, returned to his post at the gate. The pony also recognising him, and connecting his appearance with carrots and lumps of sugar,

pattered after him expectantly. No other welcome waited him in the orchard.

Dividing orchard and garden there was a wall, broken by a gate; on the orchard side of the wall were a couple of seats, where he and Athelyn had often sat, where often he had found her waiting him, seen her light dress gleaming from the opposite gate as he came across the field. She was not there now; he had come unexpectedly; and on the shady bench he sat down and meditated, half wondering—Had he done well to come? should he go in now, or return while there was still a chance of return without seeing her, and write to her what he had to say?

While he pondered he heard Athelyn's voice in the garden, then another voice, a man's voice, too. He did not want to be bored with the society of curate or doctor or country-squire. He rose up and leaning over the back of the bench glanced over the

wall between the branches of the bordering trees; he could so see into the garden, himself unseen.

On the lawn under the mulberry-tree, in one of the wicker lounging chairs that were all the summer long scattered about the garden, Athelyn was sitting. He only saw her figure in profile and her face was turned away from him; but among all the women in the world he would have recognised in a glance the deer-like grace of the poise of her head, the girlish supple figure as yet too slight for perfect beauty. Even the soft folds of the white dress looked unmistakeably Athelyn.

She was the woman he loved; yet after one glance at her his eye fixed in equally instant recognition, in surprise that was clouded with deep annoyance, on the girl who sat facing him at Athelyn's feet, her arms thrown half restfully, half caressingly

across Athelyn's lap. On the third member of the group, Paul Severne, he scarcely wasted a glance ; he gazed only on the two girls.

It was a picture he never forgot. Years after he could have painted from memory exactly how the sunshine slanted through the slightly stirring branches of the mulberry-tree and shimmered on the long curves of Athelyn's white-robed figure, how the shadows on the grass mixed with those flickering lights at her feet, how softly and flower-like her hand lay on Cressida's arm. He could recall the very tint of the dim blue-grey dress that Cressida wore, the line of the loose coil in which her tawny hair was carelessly twisted, and the tress that strayed over her shoulder and caught and tangled one amber sunbeam in its meshes. It burnt itself into his memory for ever, the picture of those two—those two together.



He leant and looked at them with fixed eyes and knit brow, pondering—Should he show himself?

The question was decided for him. The two white terriers burst upon the scene, Jim caracoling proudly with a stick in his mouth, Tim bounding upon him with playful feints of attack and joyous barks, and both galloping in headlong career towards the gate near which was his post of observation.

Not choosing to be unearthed by the dogs, who would be upon him in a minute or two, he forestalled them, and met them at the open gate, in full view of the group under the mulberry-tree. While he encountered with his usual tranquillity the shock of the canine welcome—while Jim in his joy dropped his stick from his mouth, and Tim pounced upon and shook it vain-gloriously—the trio on the lawn looked up

and saw Harold Parkhurst coming along the path towards them.

Athelyn changed colour in silence, a glad gleam in her eyes, an anxious tremulousness about the corners of the sensitive lips. Cressida's fresh cheek turned white; her heart leapt up with a cry that died into silence ere it reached her lips, and then its pulsing stopped. She could not breathe; she could not move; she rested in silence at Athelyn's side, conscious only of one wild wish that the earth would stand still, that he, so near, might never draw nearer, and the impending moment never come. As to Paul, he was looking with casual incurious interest at the stranger, a total stranger to him, and did not think of watching Cressida.

Athelyn rose as he drew near and took a step to meet him, offering her hand half eagerly, with a soft welcoming smile. Cressida rose too, and it seemed in shy and

retiring modesty that she hung behind Athelyn, and quite by accident that her face was turned away from Paul.

“ Well, I’m here again, you see !” Harold said, holding Athelyn’s hand tight, but with a little less freedom and familiarity than usual in his greeting, on account of the witnesses. Then he looked at Cressida cautiously. As their eyes met, hers shot one lightning-swift glance of piteous, almost agonised entreaty and warning, then she looked at him with stony and half defiant unrecognition.

He on his part regarded her with the perfect blankness of polite indifference, and his glance moved on from her to Paul Severne without one betraying flicker of knowledge, comprehension, or response.

Athelyn, after a few words of commonplace greeting, turned to her friends, and introduced them to Mr. Parkhurst, who

expressed due pleasure in making their acquaintance, entered into conversation with Mr. Severne, and took no notice, beyond what bare politeness demanded, of Cressida.

They lingered on the lawn, Harold and Athelyn being chiefly instrumental in keeping the shuttlecock of conversation in the air; Paul was never strong in small talk; and as to Cressida, she did not know what words she was uttering, was scarcely conscious whether she was speaking or silent; she supposed she answered appropriately when addressed, for no one looked at her curiously; but the scene was to her like the early stages of a nightmare, while the horror whose presence is felt has not yet taken shape, and every now and then she felt as if she must scream and wake; and every time Paul's kind honest eyes smiled upon her, her very soul burnt and blushed, though her cheek did not change.

Presently, as they sauntered towards the house, they fell into pairs, Paul and Cressida lingering in the rear, while Mr. Parkhurst and Athelyn went on in front. Athelyn looked up at him with earnest, questioning eyes, whose mute appeal he answered.

"I've come, child, you see," he said, in his brusque way, with just a touch of reluctant tenderness. "I was deliberating whether I'd write or come. If I had anything pleasant to say I would have been here before."

He looked away from her as he spoke; and they walked a few steps in silence.

"You have—nothing but bad news then—Harold?" she said, faintly.

"Nothing else," he answered, bitterly.

Then Mrs. Hastings appeared at the window, beckoning them to come in to lunch.

That meal was a trying ordeal to nearly

all the little party. Harold, Athelyn, and Cressida had each their own sad or bitter thoughts. Mrs. Hastings, keen-sighted only through her maternal love, suspected more by instinct than by any betraying sign that Harold bore no good news, and that there was sorrow in store for her darling. Only one was at ease, and that was Paul Severne, who, in happy unconsciousness of all the skeletons at the feast, first pleased himself by critically carving up a recently published work whose author disagreed with his dearest doctrines, and then entered into a discussion with Harold Parkhurst on the wide subject of the aim and the proper limitations of Art.

Harold entered into the topic as if at that hour he had not another interest in the world ; he was one of that class who while most painfully variable and transparent in their moods to their intimates—especially to

the women of their household, if they have any—are impenetrable to strangers. No one watching him this day could have guessed whether he was glad or sad at heart. Athelyn had the self-possession and serenity of delicacy and reserve, added to the natural powers of concealment with which at such times the weakest woman is strong enough to shield herself from observation.

Yet Cressida, as she watched these two, wondered.

Athelyn was beautiful, and Harold Parkhurst seldom saw such beauty without seeking it. And they must have met often in the lovely summer days—those days of bloom and light, which to man and woman “in their loving season” are as empty frames unless some jewel of romance or love is set in them. Could two such as these have met and escaped scatheless of heart?

When the two girls were alone his name naturally came up between them, but they touched it lightly and cautiously.

“Is—Mr. Parkhurst going back by the evening train?”

“I don’t know. No, I don’t think so.”

“Is—is he a great friend of yours, Athelyn?”

“Oh, one gets on friendly terms with people in the country. And when an artist has been sketching one’s portrait, one learns to—know him pretty well.”

Athelyn turned her face away and busied herself with trifles on the mantelpiece as she spoke. Cold at heart, and half sick with suspense as she was, with the memory of his words an hour ago, the anticipation of the interview in store, she could not talk of him to Cressida.

She longed for, yet half dreaded that interview. With all her affection for Paul and



Cressida, she was glad it was the last day of their visit, while yet somehow the hours that they were with her seemed like a reprieve. In the evening they would be gone, then she and Harold would be together—free, and then—well, if she was to suffer, she would suffer alone.

It was well for Cressida that Athelyn, shut in her own reserve, shrank from all allusion to his name and shunned all approach to confidence—or at least, it *seemed* well then, for Athelyn's eyes were almost a torture to Cressida that day; she could not endure to meet their gaze. Soft and all guileless as they were, they seemed to the other's shrinking soul to smite and search.

During the afternoon Cressida contrived to slip away from the rest of the party and ramble out in the garden alone. Anything to get away—alone! was all her thought. She wandered as far away as the limits of

the not very extensive grounds permitted, and sank down on a shaded bench and hid her face in her hands, instinctively crouching back out of sight behind the boughs, though there were none near to see.

But here, silent, alone, thoughts crowd upon her—thoughts banished while other voices were in her ears, and other faces before her sight find their way to her here. Memory, that has lain in wait like a tiger in the bushes by her path, watching to catch her alone and defenceless, makes its spring now.

She is unprotected by other presences, unshielded by the imperative need of calm. Now memory leaps from its lair and seizes her. There is nothing to distract her, nothing to help her here. It fastens its fangs into her soul; it rends her with repeated reproaches, crushes her with echoes of whispers long unheard. For the most

part, it is these "light things and slight" that scourge a soul. From out the velvet sheath of past sweet hours come the talons that tear.

She could not bear the memories that seized and played with her, and mocked her as they tossed her soul to and fro. She put her hands to her ears as if to shut out audible whispers, and started up and wandered feverishly about, across and around the orchard, not thinking, but trying to fly from thought, for thought was charged with memory, and there seemed just now no room in it for hope. She hurried her steps as if Thought were on her track, and she could outstrip and escape it; she repeated to herself as clinging to one comfort—and yet that comfort seemed mere words; she could not realise its meaning—

"This autumn I shall be away over the sea, and leave all my past behind."

Then she began to wonder whether they would think her absence strange, and to feel reluctantly that she must retrace her steps towards the house. She entered the garden, took the homeward way, and then and there she found herself face to face with Harold Parkhurst.

They were near a crossing of the paths; there was a turning between them, but they were coming straight towards each other—face to face. Each moment, each step, brought them nearer together. He looked at her, and she knew that in a moment they must meet, that he would speak to her.

The dark bold eyes, that this day hitherto she had hardly dared to meet, were bent upon her; and under their gaze, though all they expressed was a certain far from unkindly curiosity, her heart bounded and seemed to beat itself against imprisoning

bars ; her limbs shook beneath her ; her step faltered and she stood still. She was like a little bird who hears the warning rattle, and stares paralyzed at the curved snake about to uncoil and spring. Her white lips, from which all the coral colour had suddenly fled, quivered ; her eyes met his with a wild and startled look.

She felt as if she should turn dizzy, and faint and fall ; she did not know whether the passion that surged through her veins was hate or love, resentment or terror—and if the latter, whether she feared herself or him. Only one wild and sudden impulse of escape—from him or from herself—seized her, and as he drew near she turned and darted down the other path, and fled fast as a frightened hare.

They were all together in the drawing-room again. Mrs. Hastings was pouring

out tea into Harlequin egg-shell cups, and asking Paul if he was really sure that they must leave that afternoon, and if it was quite impossible for them to stay till the morrow?

“Really sure; it would be quite impossible to stay away from town any longer, wouldn’t it, Cressy?”

She knew by his tone that he might be persuaded into lengthening their visit if she were to appeal for it, but just because she perceived that he would yield to her request, she utterly ignored that perception, and agreed that it would indeed be quite impossible, and trembled lest he should in all kindness suggest that she might stay if she liked. What could she say if he did? Happily for her, no more was said on the subject. Athelyn, who was absently balancing her tea-spoon on the edge of her cup with her thoughts far from Cressida,

did not press the question; and the latter was now too much absorbed in her own thoughts to notice Athelyn's abstracted look.

Cressida, angry with herself for her own weakness, was consequently wroth against Harold Parkhurst for being the cause of that effect. With feminine unreason, her passionate anger against him for involuntarily crossing her path that day flamed far higher than her just resentment against him in the past. Unintentional and unexpected, and *mal à propos* to him as to her, though their meeting was, she instinctively and illogically resented upon him the measure of its effect on her, as if it were his plan and scheme.

Once when Athelyn was occupied reaching up a bit of water-cress to her canary in its cage, and Mrs. Hastings and Paul were talking over the tea-tray, Cressida found

herself near Harold, for the moment unobserved. She said not a word, but looking up suddenly she flashed upon him one fiery glance of wrath and hatred and bitterness—an expression that for the moment so transformed her blue eyes that he almost started in astonishment. But his look crossed hers, bold and keen as a bayonet thrust. She saw a glitter of haughty defiance in his eye, and the sudden flash faded as suddenly from hers, quenched in a tremor of something like fear. Had that resentful glance of hers challenged him? Would he speak? What would he say?

Harold Parkhurst however was no more the man to “say anything” than he was the man to blench under a reproach however just.

The parting hour came; the pony-carriage rattled round to the door to convey Paul and Cressida and their modest amount of



baggage to the station. Richards the factotum, who combined in himself the offices of gardener, groom, and coachman, announced that all was prepared; and Mrs. Hastings and Athelyn came out to the gate in readiness to speed the parting guests.

Harold Parkhurst was of course there too, talking to Mrs. Hastings as if she were his spiritual sister and mother and his soul's affinity—to Athelyn as if she were a beautiful creature he had just had the felicity of being introduced to, and was worshipping at a distance—and taking no notice whatever of Cressida's presence.

Then the girl's passionate untrained heart swelled with an anguish that seemed bitterer even than the first sight of him here in Athelyn's home had been. Was it thus that they must part, with not one glance, one syllable, one sign, to soften the memory of that sword-sharp look they had exchanged

but now? Could it be thus they two should part, with steely looks of hate and anger and defiance?

It was thus she was thinking while she spoke in her softest tones a grateful good-bye to Mrs. Hastings, while Paul had a few last words with Athelyn, and Harold lounged apart and patted the pony's nose.

When Athelyn took her in her sisterly arms, and kissed her with her pure gentle lips, then for a moment she clung to Athelyn, and felt vaguely that here were faith and truth and safety that she was leaving behind—she longed to say: “Oh, let me stay with you—with you alone!”—regretted with a passing bitterness of yearning that she must leave Athelyn, taking her secrets with her.

Athelyn's farewell to her was warm and tender as it could be. The consciousness that she had felt absorbed in her own anxiety, the fear lest in that absorption she might

have seemed abstracted or lukewarm to her friend, made her doubly affectionate. It seemed to Cressida at that one last moment that she was letting go some anchor in leaving Athelyn's love behind. There was a mutual consciousness—afterwards they fancied it an unaccountable foreboding—in both the girls which shadowed them with a strange sort of earnestness, and even struck a tragic note in the undertone of their farewell.

So they parted, each keeping her secret.

As Cressida turned to step into the chaise Harold was standing close by. He did not offer his hand; the recollection of that one resentful glance of hers was fresh in his mind; he only bowed, with eyes impenetrable as stone.

Paul got in, settled himself and his bags, and drew the carriage-rug up comfortably; Mrs. Hastings kissed her hand from the gate; Richards gathered up Topsy's reins;

Harold and Athelyn, uttering a few final casual words to the parting guests, were now standing side by side.

It was to Harold that Cressida's eyes turned—on him they dwelt to the last. Not in love—surely not in love!—yet not in hate nor in resentment now, they clove to his face. She dared not speak; she dared not let her look speak for her. Only as one taking a death-bed farewell she gazed back at him standing there in the sunset light. And at that moment she felt the bitterness of death in tearing her look from him at last, and leaving him without a word.

## CHAPTER IX.

BY HIS WILL.

Here at last we bury our love ;  
This seal closes the coffin's lid ;  
The clerk below, the court above,  
Pronounce it dead ; the corpse is hid ;  
And I, who never crossed your will,  
Consent—that you may have it still !

JOAQUIN MILLER.

THEY are gone, and Harold and Athelyn are alone at last ; the door is shut, and they are free to speak.

She goes to him and lays her two hands in his, and looks up in his face.

“You are pale, Athelyn,” he observes, looking back at her intently.

“Am I?” she says, with a smile that only touches her lips. “Never mind.”

He wonders whether she and Cressida have had any confidential conversation—whether any word of Cressida’s is dwelling on her mind? Surely Cressida cannot have been so rash as to confide in Athelyn? His brow darkens at the thought.

“Are you tired? or ill?” he asks.

She shakes her head.

“No—only——”

“Only what?”

(Can Cressida have spoken?)

“I know that you—have something to say to me, Harold—and—and—I am ready to hear it—that’s all.”

He reads in her candid face that that *is* all; it is enough, for her.

“Well, it won’t take long in saying,” he responds. “I had been deliberating whether I would write to you or come

You read the paper—you know Lord Brantyre is dead?"

He spoke the name with a certain hard formality that told her more than words could have done.

"Yes."

"And you know—you always knew, of course?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't think I ever had any hopes or any expectations," he said, quickly; "I never had, not consciously," he added, with a certain rudimentary conscientiousness and truth that were among Harold Parkhurst's brief list of virtues. "And well for me I never had. Where there's no hope, hope can't be dashed."

They were both silent for a few moments; then he said suddenly, with almost vehement abruptness,

"Do you wonder, Athelyn, if there's

some bitterness in me? Could you expect me to sit down and smile content when I remember—when I remember—— From even before my birth Fate was against me. Well, that's all the buried past; all skeletons are buried; and it's nothing to you, nor me!"

There was another pause; then he continued, rather as if the words burst out from his thoughts than as addressing her personally,

"I was down at Brantyre. No one knew me there. The watch-dog in his kennel was more than I. The dog had some claim, some right on the land. I was, and am, *nothing*! But there, I am not going to talk to *you* of all this. Let it pass. I stand as I have always stood—alone."

She looked up for a moment, and he felt her hands tremble and cling closer in his.

"And now this is what I have come to



say to you, Athelyn—it will be no surprise to you, I think, now. Alone as I have always been, I must be to the end. My dreams of marriage and home were mad. I abjure them. You are free.” Yet as he spoke he still held those slight trembling hands clasped in his own.

She looked in his face silently, while every syllable of his words struck like a hammer on her heart. At last she said, with a sort of faintness and pathetic perplexity in her tone, yet quite steadily,

“But—Harold—I don’t quite understand. You tell me that I am free from you—that we must part—because things are going badly with you? If you had been triumphant, in all prosperity, you would have stood beside me and claimed my faith! And *now*—you say to me that I am free?”

“It’s not your doing; it’s mine!”

“But, Harold—Harold—is it for my sake?”

“For both our sakes ; for mine as well as yours. We dreamt ; yes, it was a sweet dream ! but I am awake now. I give you up !” He loosed her hands from his as if in that moment he let her go for ever. “I must face real life. Life is all dull ugly realities—all of it that isn’t a devil’s dance in fair-seeming masks. I *will not* drag you down to poverty and trouble. Go your way—I will go mine. I might say, ‘ Wait !’ Wait ? for what ? My prospects will be no brighter a year hence than they are now. I know my own life—I know *myself*. I could not compensate you for the hardships you might have to endure with me. I should doom you to misery, child.”

“You think—you think,” she said, tremulously, “that it will be anything but misery without you ?”

Something in the childlike simplicity and womanly sorrow of her tone struck him to

the heart, made him wince with a sense of guilt. There were not many people who had the power of hurting Harold Parkhurst. Reproaches as a rule affected him no more than the pattering rain-drops affect the tiles; recriminations rolled off him harmlessly. Because he loved Athelyn, the quiver of unresentful sorrow in her tone hurt him now; and he was one of those who never shrink under pain, but always turn savagely upon the knife that wounds them.

“Bah! I have seen; I have lived!” he said, roughly; “I know what women are! *You*, with your youth and beauty, mourn long for *me*? Do you know what a price a face like yours ought to fetch in the matrimonial market? Take my advice; put yourself up to auction with the rest. There’ll be men enough to go wild about those eyes of yours, to bid and buy!”

“Those eyes of hers” kindled with the first angry and indignant flash he had ever seen in them.

“You need not insult me,” she said.

“*I* insult you?” Half astonished, half with an indignation that was almost threatening, he laid his hand upon her wrist. “Do you say to me that *I* insult *you*?”

At the clasp of his hand, at his tone, far as it was from soft or appealing, her impulse of anger melted in a second. With a sudden revulsion of feeling—more sudden and stronger probably than if he had been more gentle—she looked up into the stern deep eyes, the dark sad face, and forgot all in the world except love and sorrow.

“Oh! Harold, do you really mean it?” she said simply, yearningly.

“Mean what?”

“All—all—that you have been saying?”

“I mean it all. Have I not said it plainly enough?”

This stung her again; her pride rose up in arms.

“Yes,” she said, haughtily, “plainly enough. You shall not be troubled to say it again.”

“Then it’s good-bye between us, Athelyn?”

“Yes, it is good-bye; I understand all, and there’s no need for more words except good-bye.”

She was for the moment cold as snow and proud as a princess. He half wondered; he could scarcely recognise in her the soft-eyed girl who, with all her delicate shyness, had lifted her face so often and so trustfully to his kisses, nestled so confidingly to his heart.

“You are angry, Athelyn,” he said, with the air of a man nobly and patiently for-

bearing with a woman's unreasonable caprice, "but you will see one day that I have decided for the best."

"Too late!" she muttered, bitterly.

"Not too late, as you will realise yet."

"Then if all ends between us, let it end now and here," she said, half drawing back, yet irresistibly compelled to hold out her hand.

He took the hand gently, looked at her with an almost anxious mournful tenderness.

"I have hurt you, child," he said, in softer tones, "but you don't think that I have not hurt myself too? Do you think I don't suffer? Don't let us part in anger, love, if you have loved me!"

She winced and quivered at the words. The snow-maiden thawed at a touch and a tone into a trembling, loving girl; the proud gleam of her eyes was quenched and melted suddenly in a blinding mist of tears.

“In anger, Harold?—oh, never—never!” she murmured, passionately. “Part—part in anger—with *you*?”

Her voice broke in a sob; the next moment she was clasped in his arms, and clinging round his neck, simply as a child who loves, wildly as a woman who despairs, while he strained her to his heart in a passion of parting. Again and again he kissed the tender lips from which of his own accord he was severing himself; for one last time his heart throbbed and triumphed in the full possession of the love which he was putting from him of his own wayward will.

“My Athelyn—my heart’s best love—purest and sweetest angel that ever crossed my path—good-bye! Oh, if the luck were ever to change for me—if any day of good fortune came—but no; I’m mad to dream!—I swore to speak no words to you but of good-bye. There never can be friendship;

there must be all or nothing between us two. And so, my one pure darling, kiss me once more, and say good-bye—good-bye once and for ever !”

“ Good-bye,” she said, in a faint, changed voice. “ And now—for God’s sake leave me now while I can bear it !”

So he left her, took all the joy and the hope and the youth out of her life, and left her there alone.

She sat still and stricken as he left her, neither faint nor weeping, but feeling stunned, and knew not whether time lagged or flew, until looking up she saw her mother’s fair, anxious face watching her with questioning eyes.

“ Well, darling ?” Mrs. Hastings said.

Athelyn looked up fixedly, vacantly, and made no answer.

“ Speak, dear child ; what is it ?”



“He’s gone,” the girl said, shivering a little, and then repeated after a pause, as if the words had failed to carry a meaning, and she were trying them over again, “He’s gone.”

Mrs. Hastings knew that; she had seen Harold for just a few brief moments as he departed; he had bent over her hand and kissed it reverently, sadly, and so taken his farewell, probably, by his look, deeming explanation needless.

Athelyn’s manner and the tone of his farewell conveyed to Mrs. Hastings almost all that was to be told.

“Gone; and—not to return?” she said, softly.

“Not to return.”

There was silence between them then. Mrs. Hastings had learned well the

“Lesson

Wiser, truer than all the rest,  
That to help and to heal a sorrow  
Love and Silence are always best.”

But it was love undemonstrated, unexpressed. She knew Athelyn well enough to feel that she must let her alone in her quietude until it broke of itself, that caresses, tears, and kisses would be but cruel kindness now.

“Oh, mother darling,” the girl said, presently, looking at her with wistful, wondering eyes, “why can’t I feel unhappy?—I ought to, but I don’t; I feel all numb and dead!”

That night the rain came down—a steady torrent of autumn rain that quenched the starlight, and bore down the beaten leaves from the branches and strewed them dead and dripping on lawn and path.

It seemed to Athelyn that Nature for once was in accordance with her mood, and like a tender mother weeping with her grief; all the world appeared broken up in tears, and yet she did not care. The har-

mony or discord of the great, cold outer world with her own heart mattered nothing. It might as well for her have been the glory of a midsummer moonlight, the radiance of innumerable stars, as these sobbing showers and wailing winds that cried around the house.

She lay listening sleepless from midnight until morn, and the ceaseless monotonous drip, drip almost drove her mad. She never afterwards could hear the patter of a dreary, driving rain in the darkness of an autumn night without recalling that vigil. In the beat of the rain on the roof she kept fancying that she heard mingling the sound of wheels bearing Harold away; every shrill gust of wind setting from that quarter bore to her strained ear the smothered whistle of the passing train.

And the rain poured on, steadily, cruelly; it seemed to be washing away all the bright-

ness out of her life. It surged over and sapped the foundations of all the fair cloud-castles of her future ; she saw them dissolving and sinking, crumbling into shapeless heaps, like a child's sand-fortress when the waves lick round it and noiselessly lap it away.

Sleep, who loves health and peace of body and of mind—who coquettes with the sufferers who court her, and spreads her wings and flies from those who seek her madly and cry and crave for her, kept far from Athelyn that night. The night seemed a year, and yet she scarcely longed for it to pass, for she felt that with the day and the return to daily life she must *realise* the void that at present she *knew*, but could not comprehend.

There came a tearful grey dawn ; a chilly languid eye of light too faint to flush into rose, too cool to mellow into gold, began to

open beneath the dark drooping fringe of heavy-hanging clouds.

Athelyn opened the window, and let the damp wind fret her hair and the dews of morning chill her cheek as she watched the pale east grow bright.

It brought back to her mind another dawn—a memory that ever lay so fresh and near the surface that the name of the passing associations that struck down to it was legion. And with the broadening daylight came clear perception, and the realisation of the gulf between that day and this. Between those two dawns lay the depths of unsurpassable joy and irreparable loss. She faced her future, saw the long days full of little duties and trivial cares and things that once were pleasures and would be called pleasures still.

And then came tears at last.

“Harold—Harold! I must live my life

without you! I must live without my heart, for my heart is gone with you, and there's nothing here where it once was but pain!"

And close upon that blind moan of love came the reaction that with a nature like hers follows it surely as its shadow.

"But you shall not find me unworthy, love, nor think that I was not strong enough to bear your will. I *can* live without you if you will it so. You found me weak—you leave me stronger by your strength. I can endure it well."

## CHAPTER X.

## DICK'S NEW FRIEND.

This is the man  
Through whom my life to such dishonour ran !  
He was the snare in which my soul was caught.

P. B. MARSTON.

THE Hastings family had left England, to winter abroad according to their previous intentions ; and with their departure it seemed that the only possible link between Harold Parkhurst and Cressida Lane was broken. She thought so at least, and so—when he thought at all about it—did he. But Fate sometimes malevolently forges such links of tough metal, Violence will

not snap them asunder, nor time and absence rust them through.

If there was any change in Cressida it was a slight and almost imperceptible nervous anxiety, a child-like endeavour to "be good," that had something pathetic in its simplicity. She reined her ready tongue, and kept a careful restraint on every movement of impatience or petulance; somehow now she felt that her patience and cheerfulness *needed* guarding; a little thing tried her; she was restless, and counted the days, and wished the future was in her grasp. Still she had never been more sweetly and devotedly anxious to lavish on Paul the only help that she could give him—her co-operation in some trifles, her interest and sympathy in all things, a comprehensive womanly sympathy which was to him the strength and tonic he just then needed. He had plenty to trouble him; things had been



thrown back by his illness; a man cannot well marry and take his wife to Australia without a pound in his pocket; and he had to work hard and scheme skilfully to pave the way to the promised land.

Cressida missed Athelyn almost more than she had anticipated; she did not quite know whether it was that one sweet friend alone that she missed, or whether altogether her life seemed to have been jarred and shaken out of the smooth way it had but newly found. She was singularly alone too; her few former friends seemed beneath her or estranged from her now; she had grown a world away from them. Paul's intimate friends were not a very large—nor, sooth to say, a very select circle; from some of them he had himself drifted a little away lately; and from almost all he kept Cressida apart. His family took no notice of her; of her own family there were none left, and

if there had been, she probably would have felt their atmosphere uncongenial since Paul's love and Athelyn's friendship had seemed to set her apart from her old life. "As the sparks fly upwards," we leave our old lives behind us beyond return.

She felt very lonely sometimes. She seldom saw any of her old acquaintances without her vanity being wounded or her feelings ruffled. The visits she liked best to pay were to a few poor people who greeted her as if her appearance were a compliment, to whom she could give a trifle of help, and enjoy the consciousness that her coming was looked for as a real bit of pleasure. Amongst these were little Dick Tenterden and his grandmother.

Old Mrs. Tenterden was not however quite so satisfactory a person to pay visits of condolence and comfort to, as those others who had not known Cressida in her

days of hopeless and friendless poverty. She recollected Cressida's first appearance at Mrs. Brown's a shade too well. But the old woman had grown past considerations of rank ; her sense was blunted as to distinctions of caste ; one human creature was very much the same as another to her ; and one of the few faint glimmers of romance left in her shadowy life clung round Cressida, whose fair face and sweet voice were ever welcome there, and whose prospects stirred a mild interest in Mrs. Tenterden still—which nothing else did now except little Dick's schooling and her creature comforts. Then Dick was very fond of Cressida ; and her visits were marked with almost the only white stones in the little lame boy's life.

Cressida seldom went quite empty-handed, although she had little to give. I don't know whether anybody has ever satisfactori-

ly explained why the poor are so far more generous and give so much more freely from their mite than the rich from their abundance.

Giving was pleasant to her; and when she felt discontented or restless, Mrs. Tenderden's little room preached her a silent sermon. Nowhere else did she realise so forcibly that she was young and fair, with vast possibilities of love and life before her still.

The Tenderdens' room was always chilly, even when there was a fire, yet always close, even when the brave north-easter was blowing. The walls were mouldy, and there was only an occasional patch of the original paper-hanging left on them; it peeled from the damp lath-and-plaster, and Dick used to tear it off in strips and make boats to sail in the wash-tub or cut out little men to act plays with. Through the dimmed glass of

the windows you got only a spotted and obscure view of the other side of the street. From the broken table propped up with a maimed towel-horse, to the chipped discoloured mantelpiece adorned with pill-boxes, phials, and faded daguerreotypes of deceased friends, everything was miserable and squalid, and to Cressida a pitiful touch of attempted cleanliness and neatness about it made it look the more dreary and hopeless.

There, day after day unchangeably, and with no hope of change, the old woman sat in her narrow circle of life, the half-a-century ago past as near to her as the hour ago, and nearer than the yesterday, the heaven with its myriad angels singing round the throne as a to-morrow's reality, and between these two—the long-ago past and the future beyond the grave—the present lost, except for the two things that tied her

to consciousness of her daily life, little Dick and the consideration of her dinner; perhaps, indeed, only the latter, for dinner was a living interest from day to day, while Dick represented to her as much his father as himself, and Dick's future life on earth was a thing she would not live to see, though she often looked forward to meeting him in Heaven without his crutches.

"Aren't you very dull here all alone?" Cressida asked, sympathetically, one day when Dick was out.

"No, my dear, no, I ain't dull; I sit and think over my past life; it's like reading a book; I sit here, an' it all passes before me; I daresay as you'll be one day doin' the same, my dear."

"If I live so long," the girl said, suppressing a very earnest "God forbid!" which was at the tip of her tongue, as she looked at the old woman sitting over the

fire, rolled up like an untidy mummy in nondescript shawls, with her grey hair straggling under a faded cap, her yellow wrinkled face, and skinny hands, never active more, appearing to Cressida's critical and fanciful young eyes like one of the witches she had seen dance round a cauldron in "Macbeth," which she had once viewed from the pit with shuddering interest.

"And when are you going to be married?" the old woman inquired; she put this question as regularly as a greeting, probably deeming that of such a topic her visitor could not have too much.

"As soon as we can," Cressida replied, somewhat drearily.

"What's the trouble, my dear?—why can't you? Mr. Severne means all fair, if ever I see a gentleman as did."

"Money's the trouble, as it usually is in

this world," Cressida said, with a somewhat vexed flush, avoiding the question of Mr. Severne's fair meaning. "It isn't only buying the ring. Of course we can't start without some prospects. We have got to make our way to Australia and live for a little time there, while we look round, and Mr. Severne won't leave a penny owing in England either, and that keeps us."

"Ah well, my dear, patience—everything'll all be put square in the next world," old Mrs. Tenterden said, vaguely; this very doubtful consolation was the one she usually fell back upon. "Let me have a drop o' that sherry-wine now, my dear"—pointing to a medicinal-looking phial which Cressida had brought as an offering,—“and I could just fancy a bit of polony and bread out o' the cupboard with it."

"Where's Dick gone?—I've a cake for him too."



“ He’s just wanderin’ about amusin’ himself lookin’ at the shops ; it’s nigh all the pleasure he gets, is the shops. He’ll be in soon ; you’ll stay ? The boy ’ud just break his heart, if you was to go without seeing him.”

It was muddy and foggy in the busy streets that day ; but Dick did not mind the damp raw atmosphere, nor the mud that soaked through his torn shoes, and splashed his ragged garments, which Granny had cut out of an old coat. He was looking at the shops, staring with all his eyes at the things good to look at and things good to eat ; perhaps the latter fascinated him most, but then they were the most tantalising. He lingered by the cookshop, coveting the white and rosy ham, the tempting pork-pies garnished with parsley, inhaling the appetising odour of boiled beef and pudding which came up through the grating. He gazed in with

more distant admiration at the drapers and milliners, where the rainbow-coloured display of dresses and ribbons brought him vague reminiscences of the spangled columbine and lime-lit transformation scene of his one Christmas pantomime; he pressed his nose against the plate-glass of a toyshop where a wonderful mechanical rabbit was beating a drum. By the time he had enjoyed his peregrinations for a couple of hours, Dick looked well-nigh as ragged and muddy a little Arab as you would see in even London streets—with his pinched dirty face that might have been pretty, and his tousled fair hair under the dilapidated relic of a cap.

He was worshipping at the shrine of a pastry-cook's, indulging in something just a shade better than a Barmecide feast—for if he could not taste he could at least see—when a gentleman who was sauntering

slowly along noticed the ragged little cripple with the smeared face and the big blue eyes that looked like bits of azure sky that had got lost from the past summer and had taken up their home for the sake of contrast under this poor little mortal's brows.

He paused as he passed, and carelessly dropped a sixpence into the boy's hand. Dick looked up in astonishment, and then a broad smile of delight spread over his face. The gentleman smiled too, very kindly—there were not many of the busy passers-by of London who smiled so kindly at Dick—and went on his way.

Dick clutched his treasure fast in his hand, and for a few moments stood solemn as a judge debating what he should do with it. Then the temptation of certain triangular jam-puffs and striped cubic bull's-eyes conquered. He went into the confectioner's shop, and stood gazing with awe and admir-

ation, from the marble slab laden with dainties to the stately dame behind it, from the crystal jars full of many-coloured sweets, fascinating to the eye as to the palate, to the elegant young ladies who were sitting at a little round table eating cheese-cakes.

The stranger who had bestowed the smile and the sixpence *en passant* had meanwhile sauntered into a tobacconist's. Coming out after loitering over a purchase, he caught another glimpse of the little crippled Arab, with his face beaming with joy, eating a three-corner puff and holding in the other hand a bag that appeared to be bursting with penny buns.

Dick, however, did not observe his benefactor, but, absorbed in his tart, and hurrying homewards with his spoil, proceeded to cross the road. Traffic was brisk there; the road was slippery with mud; and Dick, limping along hurriedly, laden with his

treasures, was more careless than usual. He was nearly knocked down by a Hansom cab, and, taking a run to escape that danger, lost a crutch, slipped and fell, right in the way of a van that was rattling along at a dangerous pace.

There were shouts of warning, partly to the driver and partly to the boy. One gentleman wasted no time in shouting, but sprang at once to the horses' heads, and, though at considerable risk to himself, seized the reins in a firm grip. The impetus of the pace was too great to be arrested at once ; it nearly bore him off his feet, and before he and the driver together could stop the horses, the boy was down among the hoofs and wheels.

As usual, a crowd seemed to spring by magic out of the ground ; the horses were reined back, and there was a rush to lift the fallen boy and carry him to the pave-

ment. Dick, with his face and hands cut and bleeding, was stunned for the moment, but they had scarcely got him as far as the nearest doorstep when he came to himself to hear people putting the cheerful question, "Is he killed?"

"Are you much hurt, my boy?" asked the gentleman who had endeavoured to save him—the same who had before noticed him. Dick looked up and recognised the face. Then he glanced round and felt for his precious parcel, now lying trampled in the mud, and began to cry.

"Take him to the hospital," said somebody.

At this suggestion Dick started and looked wildly round,

"No—no—I won't—I won't go to the 'orspittle! I ain't hurt—I ain't hurt"—he said, and tried to scramble to his feet.

"You are hurt, poor little fellow; and it's

the best place for you," said a well-meaning individual.

Dick turned away with much distaste from this adviser, looked round and met the kind scrutinising eyes of the gentleman whom he recollected well as the giver of the sixpence, but whom he had not seen in his attempt to stop the horses. Dick felt instinctively that he had found a friend, and put out a small and shaky hand in appeal.

"I won't go to the 'orspittle—take me home to Granny."

The stranger felt his pulse and nodded as if satisfied.

"All right, my boy—so I will!" he said, cheerfully. "Where does Granny live?"

He hailed a cab and lifted Dick into it, so coolly and promptly taking the lead in the whole affair that nobody thought of making any other suggestions; he vouchsafed an

explanation to one or two who stood nearest him.

“The child’s not much hurt; being carried to the hospital would fret and frighten him.”

Arrived at last at the door of the house to which he had been directed, he alighted, carrying Dick’s light weight in his arms. The boy was by this time quite soothed and calm; his new friend had the knack of soothing and cheering; and though Dick was in pain, pain was nothing very new to him, while to be made much of and carried up stairs by a gentleman was a pleasing novelty.

“It’s on the second floor we live,” he said—this instruction being needful, as nobody came to open the street-door, which was on the latch. The lodgers and landlady were presumably all too much occupied with their own concerns to attend to the admission of



visitors, and they evidently had no fear of thieves.

There was a pail standing on the stairs, with a sloppy cloth hanging out of it. Having passed this safely, Dick's bearer nearly wrecked himself over a perambulator on the first landing. Then he came across a headless rocking-horse, a broken chair, and some clothes hung out to dry—a few on a cord swung across the staircase, a few spread out on the balusters, obligingly hiding the fact that nearly all the rails were gone.

Ducking under a grey flannel shirt which was flapping aimless arms over his head, he reached the door at last, knocked, and was summoned to "Come in."

"Don't be alarmed; there's nothing much wrong," he said as he entered—cautious lest the sight of little Dick, pale and carried in a stranger's arms, should be too much for

the feelings of the probably susceptible "Granny."

The light in the squalid room was dim; he saw an old woman rise up tottering out of a nest of shawls in a big chair by the low fire; and a fair-haired girl in a pretty dark dress and a little sailor hat, standing by the table with her back to the light; and for the moment he did not see the girl was Cressida. She had no need to look at *him* to recognise him; she had started at the first sound of Harold Parkhurst's voice, and stood gazing at him, turning from red to white and from white to crimson again.

"Oh! what's the matter?" exclaimed the old woman and the girl together, the first hurrying forward, the latter half hanging back.

"Cressida!" he said, recognising her in utter surprise. How long it seemed since she had heard him speak her name! Then

quickly, answering their inquiry, he added, "Nothing serious ; only a little accident—he will soon get all right."

He laid Dick down on the bed, and while the women flew to the child's side and besieged him with inquiries and anxieties, he looked at Cressida. She pretended not to notice him, but in every nerve, down to her very finger-tips, she felt his look. Was she living here? he wondered. Surely not! How came she here then? After that one involuntary utterance of her name, he spoke to her no more, but devoted his attention to administering consolation and explanation to Mrs. Tenterden, and attending to little Dick, whose trouble was divided between his own pain and the loss of his bag of cakes for Granny.

The old woman sat down on the foot of the bed and appealed to the Lord, while Mr. Parkhurst and Cressida bent over the

boy together. Neither spoke to the other; but Cressida noticed with a stab of inexplicable pain the kindly gentleness with which Harold lifted the child and arranged the pillows; and he in his turn observed, without seeming to heed, how tender and skilful was Cressida's hand—yet how it trembled! her eyes were full of tears too. Were those tears and tremors *all* for little Dick's pain?

So, strangely enough, by one of those ironies in which Destiny seems to delight, it was the good impulse, the kind deed of each, that threw these two together again.

"We ought to have a doctor," Cressida said, venturing on this half appeal to him without looking in his face.

"Is there a doctor near? I'll fetch him," rejoined Harold.

"There's Dr. Greenfield, the parish doctor, as attends us free," said the old

grandmother, "but you never find him at home at this hour."

"I'll bring some other then," he returned, promptly.

The doctor was fetched ; Mr. Parkhurst took the responsibility of the fee, as much to the doctor's satisfaction as to Mrs. Tenterden's. The two visitors naturally waited to hear the doctor's report—waited, one on each side of the grandmother, cheering her with little soothing common-places, but to each other speaking not a word.

Dick was soon pronounced to be in no danger ; a few days' nursing and care would probably set him all right again. Then Mr. Parkhurst took his leave, Dick's small shaky voice pursuing him with an entreaty to come again, Mrs. Tenterden uttering her little stock speech through life for similar occasions, "May the Lord reward you, sir, according to your deserts !"

“Better, my good soul, I hope, or I shall get off but badly when the accounts above come to be cast up!” he said, with one of his peculiar smiles.

Then, promising to come and see how the little fellow got on, he departed, without a word to Cressida—but with a look. It was not a long nor an eloquent gaze, such as he *could* give; it only questioned, lingered for a moment with grave interest on her face; she wondered whether her fancy misled her into thinking she read in it a shade of reproach. But that fancied tinge of reproach, that moment’s earnest look, did its work. She had intended to postpone her departure till he was clear off the scene and far away. But it suddenly occurred to her forcibly that she was really not needed there any longer, and she too took her leave.

The room door was shut. Harold and Cressida were together on the dilapidated

staircase, with the clothes hung out to dry flapping about their ears.

“ Well, Cressida ? ”

“ Well ? ”

She could find nothing simpler or safer to say than repeating that harmless monosyllable.

“ Last time you saw me,” he said, “ you ran away from me as if I were a wild beast. Is the very sight of me so hateful to you now ? ”

She hesitated a moment, then, with a sort of obstinacy in her low tones, said,

“ I hadn't got anything to say to you. I didn't think there was anything you could have to say to me. That's all.”

She was standing a step below him, her eyes, still averted from him, bent down on the paintless, carpetless stairs. She had no reason to stop there, no reason to turn and look up. He had put no further

question, so no word more was needed. Still she hesitated, took another step, paused, and then turned, and reluctantly, forced by an impulse she had no power to control, looked up in his face.

She was white as death, and her features were sternly set for a moment ; then, as she met his keen and piercing, and yet half tender gaze, a flood of crimson surged up and suffused her cheeks ; her lips twitched and trembled ; her great blue eyes flashed with one electric glance that was laden with anguish and reproach, and self-scorn and struggling joy—and then were quenched in blinding tears.

“ Are you happy now, child ? ” he said.

She tried to answer, but her voice was gone ; her quivering lips moved, but made no sound.

Harold Parkhurst should have had mercy then ! The extent of his power was written so plainly under his eyes—he should have



scorned to use it. There was no glory of conquest here ; there was no challenge to the chase nor ardour of combat. To vanquish *here* was like slaying a scared and unresisting animal that has fled into a corner and looks up with dumb pleading in its piteous eyes.

Cressida kept that day's meeting a secret. As a concession to conscience, she mentioned to Paul Dick's accident, but slurred it over slightly and entered into no detail. There was no reason why she should not have alluded to the fact that Mr. Parkhurst, whom they had met at Fern Cottage, had brought Dick home. There was nothing in such an occurrence to arouse the least suspicion or annoyance in Paul ; he knew little or nothing of Harold Parkhurst, and even if he had known more of the man and his life, he would have been far more likely to be lulled into regarding a planned meeting as an accident, than to have suspected a purely

accidental rencontre, as this in all truth was, to be a rendezvous.

Cressida knew all this well enough, but she kept her secret.

Paul did not observe her pale and constrained look ; he was thoughtful and abstracted himself ; he had a bundle of letters in his hand.

“Things aren’t moving very quickly, little one,” he said, in his accustomed, slow, gentle tone. “It will be all straight in a little time, but I am afraid we shall not be able to get married and off for six weeks yet.”

“Never mind, dear,” she said, with carefully calm sweetness ; “what does a little time more or less matter?”

“When we have all a new life before us !” he rejoined.

She smiled faintly, a trifle absently ; in her heart she was repeating, “Not for six weeks yet !”

She was not sure herself whether the words fell on her like a knell of doom or like a reprieve, only she was vaguely conscious that they meant a great deal to her, whether that which she was feeling and concealing was the sickness of hope deferred, or a certain faintness of relief as of one who escapes a light ordeal close at hand by running the risk of a far greater but more distant danger.

Paul loved her with a true and honourable love. Regardless of the gulf between her and the women of the world wherein it was his birthright to move, he had reached his hand to her, and long ere now—had it not been for the untoward circumstances that had thrown back his plans—would have set her at his side as his honoured wife. He had not an idea that he was making any sacrifice, or a conviction that he “could have done better.” Nor on the

other hand had he any self-satisfactory reflections that he was doing rather a fine thing. He had not a doubt nor a distrust, nor a dream of the future that was not linked with her. She owed him the love and loyal faith that she had promised, and she meant to be true to her bond.

Harold had wrecked her life for a season's pleasure, and left her to drift helmless on stormy seas. For a freak of fancy he had taken that young life and spoilt it, as carelessly as he would have plucked a bunch of peach-blossoms, destroying the hope of the summer fruit, and casting the wasted petals by to die in the gutter. The debt she owed to him was for a blighted youth, a lost innocence, days of spurious happiness, weeks of real despair.

Yet, as she stood between these two men—between her ruined past and her hopeful future, her hand pledged to the

one, her back turned upon the other, she had deemed for ever, it was the thought of that other which made her heart leap as if to new life, and die in very sickness of despair. The memory of that past burst like a dark torrent across her path, rushed surging in wild waves between her and the promised land. She looked on it aghast. How could she ever cross it?

## CHAPTER XI.

“HE IS THE MAN.”

My love was true,  
Your love was writ in sand!  
He wore me like a silken knot,  
He changed me like a glove,  
So now I moan, an unclean thing,  
Who might have been a dove!

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

MRS. HASTINGS and Athelyn are at Fontainebleau, on their way from Nice to Paris by slow stages, taking ample leisure and making the journey as much a pleasure and as little a trouble as possible. After leaving England in the autumn, they have spent most part of the winter on the

sunny shores of the Mediterranean, and are on their homeward route a little sooner than they had at first intended, Mrs. Hastings having taken it into her head to weary of the South, of glowing noons and chilly sunsets and tramontana winds, and to long for the bright clear air of Paris and its shops. Old Mr. Hastings had some time previously tired of Continental life and Continental dinners, and taken his ticket back to his club and his London cook. So here are his daughter-in-law and grand-daughter at Fontainebleau, for once alone, without being surrounded, as they usually were, by a larger or smaller party of friends more or less intimate—enjoying a few days' rest exploring the forest and the palace, and all that it is the duty of the traveller to see.

This winter has been to Athelyn of course a sad one, but still a far lighter burden to bear than she had anticipated. The hardest

time of all had been the days and weeks immediately following her separation from Harold Parkhurst, for then she was for ever wondering in a fever of unrest "Will he come back?" for ever watching for a letter or a sign from him. That was all over now; she knew that had he meant to return to her or write he would have come or written long ago; and the full acceptance of the truth was far less painful than had been the wearying suspense, the involuntary irresistible hoping against hope.

She had learnt, by the experience that you must buy for yourself, that even sympathy fails to teach, how wonderfully soon we are convalescent from the pain of a lost love, how quickly we rise up strong to "do as the world doth, say as it saith." She had learnt too how obstinately the wound refuses to cease its aching long after we have risen to all appearance whole and healed; how,



while we walk our way strong and smiling, the old pain darts and throbs, and never lets us for an hour forget.

Never a word attaching blame to Harold Parkhurst had been uttered between the mother and daughter. Even when Athelyn's cheek was palest, and the saddest yearning in her eyes, Mrs. Hastings never spoke in a manner resenting her darling's sorrow upon him who was its cause. For one thing she dared not do so, for she knew that Athelyn would have sprung to his defence quickly as a tigress, and all her gentleness have vanished into thin air at even an implication against him. For another thing, it was hard for any woman whom Harold had once pleased—especially a woman of Alice Hastings's soft kindly nature—to be severe in judgment upon him, even when he deserved it. He had a knack of posing picturesquely without affectation, of leaving

in the memory an impression as striking as irresistibly winning, above all, of conveying the idea of being a spoilt hero, and a martyr to circumstances. At first his name had been treated cautiously between them, as a thing rather to be delicately skirmished around than plainly alluded to; but lately they had fallen into a way of talking about him often and freely, as of one much loved and long enough lost to be mentioned.

They are driving through the forest of Fontainebleau to-day, at a leisurely pace, for the driver and the horse alike seem as disinclined to exert themselves as a boa-constrictor after a substantial meal. The horse is nodding solemnly, as if in a post-prandial dream, as he plods along; the driver occasionally rouses himself to perform a sleepy evolution of the whip, so far from the horse's back that the keenest instinct could not make the wakefullest animal aware of it.

There is a forecast of spring perceptible on looking attentively into the trees, where tiny buds are beginning to burst from brown to green, but none in the cool damp air, none in the raw grey sky with one great eye of blue open now but winking ominously and sleepily closer.

The landscape recalls Harold to Athelyn's mind, as most things under the heaven and on the earth do.

"It's not a pleasant day," she observes, "not even taking it at its best. Yet it's just such a bit of background as this that Harold used to like—such a one as he wanted for his 'Heloise,' you remember, cool and grey and neutral. With moonlight instead of sunshine in that misty colourless sky, it would just have suited him. You always used to horrify him by wanting a patch of red or blue in the foreground, you remember?"

"Yes," Mrs. Hastings smiles, "I remember."

"I wonder," muses Athelyn, "whether the 'Heloise' was well hung? I have not seen anything about it in the papers."

Mrs. Hastings looks at her, not anxiously, there is nothing to cause anxiety in the sweet composed face, but just a little sadly.

"Is there ever a day when you don't think of Harold, I wonder?"

"Is there ever a day when I don't live and breathe?" the girl replies, with a smile upon her lips.

A gust of chill raw air is sweeping through the trees. Mrs. Hastings, whom wintry weather does not suit, wraps her shawl round her shiveringly.

"It's a cool wind, mother mine," says Athelyn, noticing the movement. "We may as well get home as fast as we can, as we are on the homeward round. Shall I

drop a gentle hint to *cocher* not to fall asleep ?”

“ Perhaps the poor horse is tired ?” suggests Mrs. Hastings.

“ I think the poor horse knows he’s paid by the hour !” says Athelyn, laughingly. “ And you are looking cold ; so he must brisk up a little.”

So the hint is given, suavely but firmly. Athelyn’s requests are always as mild in their tone as they are decisive in intent. The driver amiably accepts the hint, with that air of a man graciously doing a favour so characteristic of the French *cocher*, and delicately caresses his horse with a coaxing tickle of the whip, to which the animal responds with a promptitude that argues admirable discipline.

“ I do wonder,” observes Athelyn, leaning back comfortably under the carriage-rug as they bowl along at an improved pace,

“how it is that we haven’t had a line from Paul or Cressida all this long, long time—let me see? not since we left Hyères.”

“Well, it would be very odd if they had not written,” rejoins her mother; “but I feel sure they must have written, and the letter miscarried. I have no faith whatever in the Continental posts. You recollect how I lost a £20 cheque through the Italian post-office? They must have written, because you know that dear Paul and Cressida would never have got married and gone off to Australia without telling us all about it; and if they had *not* gone, they would be equally sure to have written to us and explained *why* they were not gone.”

“I suppose nothing can be wrong,” Athelyn says, “because, of course, if Paul were ill again, Cressida would have written, and if she were ill he would have written.”

“Of course,” Mrs. Hastings agrees,

placidly. "Depend upon it, my dear, they are on the high seas now."

"Or perhaps already in Australia. How long do the fastest vessels take to go?"

"I think they were more likely to have taken their passage on principles of economy than of speed."

While they are thus talking of Paul and his betrothed, there happens one of those curious coincidences which occur so often in trifles that we take no account of them, while yet, if they happen in important matters, we hand the tale down to posterity as a marvel of the supernatural. Athelyn looks up casually, and sees walking towards them, with his eyes bent down thoughtfully and a wide-awake pulled low over his brows, a man concerning whom her first exclamation is—"How wonderfully like Paul!" and her next, in accents of utter surprise, "Why, it *is* Paul!"

And Paul it is. He looks up and recognises his friends with a start of astonishment equal to theirs. Athelyn fancies—it may be only her fancy—that for a moment he looks not only amazed but disconcerted at seeing them. He pauses for a moment as if in doubt; then, as they call to the driver “*arrêtez !*” he comes up to the carriage-door and shakes hands with them, while each party greets the other with a surprised and inquiring emphasis,

“*You—here ?*”

“I thought *you* were at Nice ?”

“We thought *you* were on your way to Australia by this time !”

“And where’s Cressida ?” inquire Mrs. Hastings and Athelyn together.

His face pales and changes sternly as he answers,

“She is—not with me.”

“Not with you ?” echoes Mrs. Hastings,



startled and sympathetic, while Athelyn glances up in Paul's face with quick anxiety.

"Not likely to be with me again—that's all," he says, steadily, as if resisting an impulse to thrust the question impatiently aside.

"Oh! Paul?"

"And you," he says, somewhat hurriedly, "I thought you were going to stay in the south till spring?"

"But we got tired of it, and the climate is so enervating there; we are going to Paris," Athelyn replies, mechanically, her face full of the question and the sorrow she dares not speak, and gently touching her mother in warning not to pursue the subject.

"And are you here alone?"

"We are alone now."

"Have you seen Parkhurst?" he asks, with a suddenness that startles them—

with a dark, eager questioning in his face.

“Seen Harold Parkhurst !” Mrs. Hastings repeats, taken by surprise. “No !—why?”

As if repenting his betrayal of interest, Paul shrinks back into a shell of reserve.

“I’m looking for him ; I thought you might have seen him, that’s all,” he answers, in a tone of unnatural quiet. “It’s cold for you to be staying here in this wind,” he adds ; “I’ll not detain you just now. What hotel are you at ?”

Mrs. Hastings names their hotel and its whereabouts.

“But—what do you want with Mr. Parkhurst ?” she ventures to ask. “And—Paul, you asked for him in such a strange way !”

“Did I ? Possibly. Well, I’ll come and see you. Are you making a long stay here ?”

“A few days.”

“I shall pay you a visit to-morrow—or to-day perhaps. Good-bye !”

*Cocher* touches up his steed and they drive on, while Paul pursues his way on foot.

Mrs. Hastings glances uneasily at her daughter, and reads in her face, in her utter silence, how intently she has listened to every syllable, and how instantly a greater anxiety than that on Cressida's behalf has leapt to life. Her mother looks at her hesitatingly, and then deems it best to accord with Paul's avoidance of the question. She is devoured with curiosity and anxiety ; but to shelve the subject, with Athelyn at least, seems a reprieve ; for she sees it is no good news that has to be broken. She decides that it is wisest to keep silence on the subject, but yet after a little time she cannot resist saying,

“Athelyn ! what can Paul mean ?”

“I think—I think there must be some mistake,” the girl says, but there is no decision nor conviction in her tone.

The fear of love is quick of growth as the eternal-springing hope that counteracts it. In the very shrine of the purest faith a hideous suspicion will spring suddenly into life sometimes. Athelyn is by nature the least suspicious and most guilelessly trustful of mortals ; yet in her heart by some strange instinct there has started into being an ugly suspicion, from which she turns away loathing it and almost loathing herself for its existence—a suspicion vague and formless, which she tramples down ere it can assume a distinct shape, of something wrong—she knows not what—some possible flaw in the idol that, though lost to sight and hope, is her idol still. It must be one of those instincts that warn us only too rarely, and generally too late, for the existence of doubt

or suspicion is absolutely against her nature, an antagonistic element now for the first time introduced.

“Can Harold be ill?” Mrs. Hastings hazards a conjecture presently.

Athelyn looks up startled for a moment.

“No,” she says then, “it is not that he is ill. How could that be, and Paul know it? and knowing it, keep it from us? and in so strange a tone?”

“What is it, then?”

Athelyn is silent, then says slowly, and with a sort of reserve,

“Paul is under some terrible misapprehension.”

When Paul came to the hotel, and was shown into the little salon, Athelyn alone entered to receive him. Hers was always the ascendant spirit, and she had prevailed upon her mother to let her see Paul first;

she had a vague idea that a meeting between him and Mrs. Hastings might lead to some cautious delicacy of dealing with her, some evasion or concealment, and she was not the girl to allow a curtain to be considerably drawn between her and a truth, whatever that truth might be.

She went forward and stretched both her hands to Paul, and clasped his close, and looked at him with earnest seeking eyes that in their questioning and their sympathy strove to read his soul. She did not greet him with a volley of the questions that were swelling her heart; it was only after a silence he did not seem inclined to break that she said, "Paul, what is all this?"

"Do you want to know, Athelyn?" he replied, with some reluctance. "Is it not enough that all is over between me and—*her*? We have said good-bye to her for ever—you and I."

“I care far too much for you both to be content with knowing only that. Won’t you tell me all about it, Paul?”

“Well, if you wish to hear, I will; it’s a short story—not long enough to bore you; a dozen words will do it. She has left me. I am here in search of her—and of some one else.”

Athelyn paused a moment, braced up her energies to ask, with calm and even tones betraying no suspicion,

“Why did you ask if we had seen Mr. Parkhurst?”

“Because he is the man. Wherever he is, she is, and when I find him, I shall find her.”

Her lips parted to speak, but for a moment they could frame no sound. This was truly but the realisation of her worst fear, yet, now that it came upon her, it seemed as if her darkest dreams of evil could never have pictured this.

“I can’t believe it!” she said, almost wildly. “Paul, you must have fallen into some terrible mistake! You will find out that you are wrong; something has misled you. What is your proof—your reason for thinking—this?”

“Athelyn,” he said, emphatically, “don’t delude yourself; there is *no* mistake; I am not relying on mere circumstantial evidence. Do you think *I* should be misled?”

Her large eyes gazed full into his, dilated with a sort of bewilderment—a wondering endeavour to realise.

“If—if it’s true—I—don’t understand,” she said, brokenly. “They—they are—married?”

“Married! Are you child enough to dream that he will *marry* her—unless he is forced to do it?” he added darkly, to himself.

She was looking at him steadily still, and



all the light and bloom and youth faded out of her face, and left her like a marble monument of herself.

“ Prove this to me, Paul,” she said, very quietly and firmly.

“ My own eyes proved it. I saw them together—walking, before they caught sight of me; I spoke to her afterwards—not angrily, not even suspiciously, for I was blind—I had no doubts, but I wondered she should be out with him alone. She said it was a chance meeting, but her manner puzzled me; she made excuses to shelve the subject—said she was ill, and I believed her; she seemed feverish and hysterical, and I—was fooled to the very last. The next day she was gone, and left a letter for me.”

“ A letter? And in that letter,” said Athelyn, looking up with a glimmer of hope, “ did she say she had gone *with him*?”

“She does not mention his *name* in the letter; but do I not tell you that I had seen her with him? His was the name that had been spoken between us; and, Athelyn, you never knew, did you? Did she ever tell you—that she had known him before?”

“Known him before!—no, I never heard it. Why—why did she never tell me?” she said, with a new wonder and fear in her eyes.

“She did not dare,” he said, in a deep, sad voice.

“Paul—this—is all like a dream; you tell me, and I never doubted you, and yet it seems impossible to me to believe it all. I feel—as if I must be misunderstanding—as if some mischievous spirit was twisting your words—and making them convey more than you mean. Now I am listening, tell me all—clearly.”

He looked at her for a moment doubtfully. But her features were calm as marble; her hand did not tremble; there was only a faint quivering of the muscles about her mouth. So he told her plainly, briefly, all that he knew and all that he guessed. It was an old, old story—the short pitiful story so often told, of fickle fancy paid back by passionate love—trust by betrayal; of a brief dream, waking, weariness, parting, then despair, from which the only escape seemed the river. From the river's brink, where Paul had seen her first, they could follow her story for themselves, up till the time when the old poison, never thoroughly eradicated, had begun to work again.

“And—the letter, Paul?”

He hesitated a few moments, then said slowly,

“I will let *you* see it, Athelyn. I

think—it would not be against her wish.”

He took the folded paper from his breast, and put it in her hand. Cressida’s wavering writing wavered more than usual ; but there were no tear-blots on the lines. The letter ran thus :—

“ Will you forgive me, Paul ? Do try to forgive me. I am gone away with *him*, and you will never see me any more. Don’t think too hard of me, I would always have been true to you if he hadn’t crossed my path again. There’s no man on earth could have led me away from you but him—and when I saw him again it was all over with me. I never told you his name, you never asked me, and I couldn’t tell you—and still more when I saw him at Monksfield, I *couldn’t* tell you. But now you know it was he, and when he calls me I must go. It’s best for you too—you will find some

other girl to be all that you want—all that you never found in me—for I was never good enough for you, nor fit for you really. I know that now. I was trying to be, but where's the use? My past has come back upon me and taken me again. You lifted me out of it for a little—but you see your air was too good for me to breathe. Good-bye! I'm going to be happy in my way and pay my price. And I remain,

“Yours gratefully,

“CRESSIDA.”

Athelyn read it through steadily, and carefully folded it.

“I see it all!” she said, in a very low voice, her eyes bent down.

“Yes, it's plain to see. If I had but known——”

“Or I!” In giving him the letter she looked up. Her lips were rigid as a dead

woman's, and her eyes stared at him soullessly.

“Athelyn!” he said, “what was this man to you?”

“I loved him—once!” She paused a moment and repeated, “*Once!* I wonder—” with a faint bitter laugh that seemed to distort her face, “how long was it ago?”

## CHAPTER XII.

## O U T   O F   T H E   D E P T H S.

Not poppy nor mandragora  
 Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep  
 Which thou hadst yesterday !

*Othello.*

I am yet  
 Pure and unspotted in my true love to him,  
 Nor shall it be corrupted though he's tainted,  
 Nor will I part with innocence because  
 He is found guilty !

*Duke of Milan.*

A THELYN shut herself up in her room,  
 alone at last, with a faint sense of  
 relief in being free from all observant or  
 sympathetic eyes—only a faint sense, for it  
 did not seem that anything further could

touch her much, either to hurt or to relieve.

Mrs. Hastings had been utterly incredulous when first the news of Cressida's flight with Harold Parkhurst was told to her; then, when convinced at last that there was no mistake, she had broken down into tears and wept bitterly. Athelyn, quiet as stone herself, had calmed her with soothing words. Paul, who, man-like, was always dismayed at seeing a woman cry, more especially when he was the cause of her tears, and who held his own wrath and pain sternly apart from sympathy, had speedily taken his departure.

Then Athelyn fled to her room and shut out the world. She never afterwards could forget that little room at Fontainebleau, where alone she stood that fiercest ordeal, the consuming of faith, the withering up of every illusion under the brand of a scathing truth. Every bit of furniture burnt itself



into her memory, even to the queer brass handles of the wardrobe, the strip of cocoa matting on the parquet floor. To the end of her life there would be hours when the sight of any trifle resembling those things that had surrounded her then and there would recall the desolation of the time in all its bitterness, and she would see again the straggling lilac flowers on the walls, the wintry trees through the window, as her fixed and tearless eyes had seen them that day.

She was alone with her broken trust, her ruined idols. In the past autumn days, when hope had died and Harold was gone from her, she had thought she suffered. She almost laughed in scorn as she thought of that sorrow now. We may survive the death of hope, can close its eyes, and live out our life calmly, if joylessly, while the grass grows over its grave. It is the murder

of faith whose stain can never be washed out of our souls ; it is the ghost of murdered faith that cannot be laid, that ever walks by our path,

“Sleepless, with cold commemorative eyes.”

Only it is not the murderer it haunts ; *he* wends his way in peace.

To Athelyn it seemed that, with her fair strong faith thus suddenly and violently slain, all that was worth living in life fell murdered too. Some of us see our faith decay slowly—our illusions take wing one by one for the land of dreams. But Athelyn was disillusioned with a shock ; one thunderbolt smote all her trust and hope into blackened ruins, and shrivelled up all her fair illusions of life in one fierce flame. On her the disenchantment came with the bitterness of Death itself. It was not Harold only, it was not Cressida, who failed her now. It was all humanity that tore off

its silver veil and froze her with a demon grin. She stood in a kind of horror, as one who had knelt at Mokanna's shrine and devoutly held him as the one true God, and saw him at last bare his hideous features in derision.

It was a nightmare to her. Was this life? was this the world? Where then was the life she had dreamed of—the world she had formed in her imagination? Was it all—all—a delusion and a snare? A flash of lightning seemed to show her the world as a hideous orgie of demons dancing behind fair masks of innocent faces, and trailing and trampling white robes of purity round their cloven feet.

If she had fancied earth near to Heaven before, she trembled now on the brink of the danger of deeming it hell. Dashed from the heights of the ideal, she fell to the other extreme. If they two were false, if

they two were corrupt—why, truth and purity and honour were but empty names! Love, friendship, faith, all were swept from her at a blow. With all the intense revulsion of a nature peerlessly pure—hitherto haloed round with fair illusions and breathing the air of the ideal—forced for the first time into contact with one of those cruel truths of life that scathe up the dew of innocent trust as they touch, she shuddered and recoiled. She felt her own soul tarnished, quivered and shrank into herself as if, awaking from a sweet dream, she found that in her sleep toads had been creeping over her and slimy reptiles crawling on her pillow.

Never hitherto had her untried, untempted heart been open to evil influences. Now all the demons of Hate and Wrath and Intolerance came down exulting. At last they had got a loophole through which to

riot in, and storm and seize this gentle soul. Through its very purity, its very horror of evil, Evil in another shape found footing in it.

Harsher than hate was the intolerable shrinking and loathing that she felt. All the while that she had thrown her soul prostrate at Harold's feet, adored his strength, built on his honour and on his truth as on a rock—all that time at his door, her idol's and her hero's, lay the guilt of love outraged and blasphemed.

When he and Cressida met, neither had given a sign; they had stood face to face with her and Paul, with brows unblushing and eyes unabashed. She had thanked God for Cressida's rescue, cherished her as a brand snatched from the burning, little dreaming that *he* had heaped the pile and lit the fire from which they deemed they had saved her for ever. And lo! at sight of

him, Cressida had not fled revolted from the memory that faced her, had not clung to her safe shelter in Paul's honourable love, had hurled herself wilfully back into the black and bitter waters of her sullied past.

Harold had had no mercy, she no scruple, no remorse. At once, at the first beck of sin, she had flung innocence and honour aside ; she " would be happy and would pay her price," as he for a season's plaything had set an eternal gulf between himself and Athelyn.

Since they had parted all this weary winter, she had lived only in and for him, the longing for him, the vague dream of a far-off possibility of re-union, saying in tender trust :

" He loved me, and he left me for my sake !"

For her sake ! she smiled bitterly, thinking of that trust now. Yes, well he had proved

his unselfishness and honour now—excellently well! Doubtless it was “for her sweet sake” that he had flung aside her life’s devotion, ruthlessly as he would have torn and tossed out of his path a brier that tangled his foot. As the “low-lying flame in the wind back-blown,” licks along the prairie and scorches herb and grass with its red breath, the fire of this truth swept all her gentler feelings down into dead ashes.

Mrs. Hastings came to her, expecting to find that she had given way and that her calm was broken up in tears—came to soothe and to console; but found no tears to dry, no sobs to hush. Athelyn, the bright and gentle sunshine of the home, was a creature transformed. Tall and pale and implacable as a young priestess whose office was to excommunicate, not to absolve, she seemed to tower above her

mother; and that rigid sternness of aspect seemed all the more terrible to Mrs. Hastings for the careful tenderness with which Athelyn addressed her.

“Don’t fret, mother dear. You have been crying? You shouldn’t cry. *I* don’t cry. And don’t be anxious about me. I am all right now. I was a little taken aback at first. When first you wake up and see things as they are, not as you thought they were, it is something like a plunge into icy water. But we must all wake some day, I suppose. I thought the world a garden of Eden, My eyes are open now to see the slimy trails all over it.”

“My darling,” Mrs. Hastings pleaded anxiously, “do not think the world is all bad because two whom you trusted have failed you.”

“In them life itself has failed me,” she said, her voice sinking deeper with the low tone



of passion. "No, that's foolish," she added, altering her tone with cautious calm; "it is only that the world falls short of my ideal—only that. When I heard of whited sepulchres, I thought of nothing hidden worse than dry bones and death. I never thought of the worms crawling in and out of Life!"

All the evening Athelyn held aloof from further discussion on the subject, moved about with a stern, serene, white face, never gave way nor softened, but was as one habituating herself to look with unflinching, defiant eyes upon a sight she loathed.

At night she reflected with a sort of wonder, a touch of self-scorn, a touch of self-pity, that she had never in her life before lain down to rest with feelings like these in her heart. Sorrow had not seemed so strange to her, for Love from the first brings comprehension of sorrow with it, but resent-

ment and bitterness were strange and unwelcome guests to her.

“This morning,” she thought, “I believed in everything, but—I was a better woman this morning than I am to-night.”

She had a vague sense of the danger to herself of this disillusioning, caught a glimmering perception of the conflict in which the elements of good and evil were wrestling for the soul where now for the first time they clashed.

A sudden impulse seized her to look upon Harold's portrait. She had it packed away in a safe corner of her box; she searched, found it, and holding it in the full light of the one thin candle, looked down upon it long and closely.

It was one of those striking portraits which the sun sometimes, but only too rarely turns out, just to show us what he *can* do, and that he can seize the spirit and the

inner life of a face as well as the painter who claims the monopoly of that gift, and attributes scornfully the mere line and feature to photography.

The face of Harold Parkhurst, in all its marked individuality, looked out from the frame, seemed actually to detach itself from the paper, so real and life-like were form and expression. She gazed at it with an intense and wondering scrutiny. Where was the lurking evil in that face, with its dark and delicate outline, its picturesque character—strong as the manliest, yet with a certain almost feminine refinement? It took a far acuter physiognomist than Athelyn to decipher what there was of weak and headstrong, of selfish and of sensuous in it. From under the low, level brows the dark eyes looked out with their bold steadfastness, half cynical, yet with a reserve of tenderness in their depths; the black

moustache shaded the stern, sad mouth, just softened with the dawn of a smile.

Looking at this the girl's lips quivered, then set in an angry scorn of her own weakness. But all her stern calm broke down beneath the pictured look of his eyes. Strange waves of conflicting passion swept across her face—flushes of love, tremors of tenderness, struggled with resentment and bitterness. A tempest as of meeting torrents seized and convulsed her whole nature, and in a very madness of wrath and love and agony, in a paroxysm of which she was scarcely conscious, she clenched her hands and broke and crushed the portrait in her grasp; and as the frail frame snapped and the paper rent, she cast it down upon the ground and set her foot upon it, as if then and there she trampled her love into the dust.

And then and there the reaction came.

In the moment that she cast down and set her foot upon her love, Love rose upon her in his turn, and waxing giant-like in all his outraged might, cast her, who had tried to defy him, powerless at his feet. One moment Love's rebel, the next she fell Love's slave. She dropped on her knees and snatched up the shattered portrait from the ground, and as she saw how it was torn across and across, she broke into a passion of tears. The pictured eyes—so far as she could see them, her own being so blinded—reproached her. “Et tu, Brute !” they seemed to say.

She sobbed over the poor fragments and pressed them to her lips and kissed them, murmuring fond mad words of love and regret. The breaking glass had cut her hand, and it was bleeding; she did not notice or even feel the pain till she saw the red drops fall on the portrait; then she shuddered and tried to kiss the stains away, while her

hot bitter tears fell fast upon them too. Those tears washed all the anger and the bitterness out of her heart ; the evil spirits fled away from the temple, and Love entered in and consecrated it anew.

“Forgive me—forgive me, Harold!” she sobbed. “If you have sinned, is it for *me* to deal you justice without mercy? for *me* of all the world! Oh, my poor love! whom I thought so noble and so true!—to think that I can never reverence you more! Yet shall I dare to blame you—*I*, when *you* taught me what Love was! when *you* gave me a new soul!”

Then all the influence of those days when she and Cressida and Paul had dreamt their highest dreams together, aspired together towards the noblest life, came back to plead for Cressida now. She shuddered as she recalled those lost dead days; but the memory of Cressida as she had been arose

before her with wistful wide blue eyes appealing for mercy to Cressida this day.

Athelyn could not understand the story; how could she, "chaste as ice and pure as snow," to whom Love had come in the guise of an angel to lead her nearer to God, ever *understand*?

But she began to see that there must exist pitfalls and snares along the way of life of which she knew nothing; that it might be possible for a nature, in which the seeds of good were not quite choked by evil weeds, to be led downhill even to the deepest depths—not so much through natural affinity with ill, or wilful seeking after sin, as through one single step awry, a moment's swerving from the straight path, a sinking deeper and deeper every step until too late to turn.

"I have been selfish, thinking only of myself and my own pain in this," she said.

“You have done a wicked and a cruel work, Harold, alas ! but shall I shut myself up in bitterness and isolation of soul from you for this sin of yours ? shall I strive to forget you—turn away coward-like and leave my love because of my love’s waste and pain ? Erring or stainless, in joy or suffering, whether you need my love or not, it still is yours, and it shall plead and pray for you until I die ! We are parted, parted for ever now, you and I ; your sin stands between us ; but while there is a chance on earth of any reparation or atonement of that sin I have one thing to live for !”

So Athelyn passed her ordeal. And in the morning, if her cheek was pale, her eyes hollow with sleeplessness and weeping, there was a nobler look than ever it had worn on the fair face that was girlish no more. From her still youthful beauty the charm of a certain undefinable dewy bloom



and freshness had passed for ever. But in its place there was an equally undefinable ripening and perfection of expression—that look which it passes us to describe or portray, but which we see sometimes hallowing an ordinary face of common clay, and setting it apart from the common-place for ever—a look as of hidden scars and unknown conquest—a look that only the soul which itself has fought a good fight and won a silent victory without laurel-wreath can recognise.

## CHAPTER XIII.

“I HAVE MY PART IN THIS !”

And if, as blindfold fates are tossed,  
Through some one man this life be lost,  
Shall soul not somehow pay for soul?

ROSSETTI.

“YOU have come at last, Paul?” said  
Athelyn, eagerly.

She had been looking up expectantly each time the uncarpeted corridor, into which the salon opened, creaked under a passing foot. Now she went forward to meet her friend with a sigh of relief.

“I am so glad ; I began to be afraid you were going to leave Fontainebleau without seeing us again !”

“Were you so anxious to see me? Well, I had doubted whether I’d come or not; it seemed to me that perhaps it might be better to stay away. Still here I am, you see. How are you to-day, Athelyn?—you look ill.”

“But I’m *not* ill,” she said, with the shadow of a smile, sinking back into her chair and pointing out a seat to him.

Paul Severne looked at her with that pure, sympathetic kindness in which there is no sting of pity. Pity, so called “sweet pity,” has a rare aptitude for galling wounds that already smart sorely enough.

These two who met now with the mutual knowledge of the wasted love and outraged trust of both, were too proud and too brave to shrink from the recognition of each other’s knowledge, or recoil from grappling with the subject that filled their minds.

“I am afraid I was selfish yesterday,”

Paul said, moved by the white changed look on Athelyn's face. "I was taken up with the difficulties in my own way ; I did not think enough of you. It has been hard on you, child. But you are young ; this has been but a dream of your youth ; you are awake now, and you'll forget in time."

"Are *you* awake, Paul, and shall *you* forget?" she asked, looking up straight in his face.

He paused for a moment, then said, firmly,

"I *may* forget, perhaps, when I have done all that can be done."

"And what is that?"

"First, I must find them ; he will scarcely have tired of her so soon !" he said, with a bitter curl of the lip that seemed strangely out of character with his kind, strong, thoughtful face.

"And when you find them—what then?"

“Time enough to talk of that when they are found,” he answered, quietly.

“Where are they?—have you any clue?”

“He left London for Paris. I went to Paris, and there, by a lucky chance, I met a young fellow, an artist, who had seen him ; they had come and gone, passed through Paris on the way to some one of the places round ; my informant thought probably Versailles or Fontainebleau. He was expected back in Paris very shortly, but there was no address known ; and the time was maddening waiting there, so I have been searching all the places round. Failure everywhere. This is the last place. I go back to Paris to-morrow and wait there.”

“No address in Paris, you say?”

“None. I must seek for myself.”

“But in a great place like Paris you have surely very little chance of finding anyone, with no address given, no clue?”

“I shall find them,” he said, with a sombre confidence. “It’s a matter of time—a day more or less. I can wait.”

Something in his manner made Athelyn vaguely uneasy; he was too quiet; his was that deep and self-contained calm which suggests a tremendous reserve of pent-up feeling behind.

“Where is your mother?” he asked, in a gentler and more natural tone.

“She is out; she had a bad nervous headache, and I made her go for a drive with some nice English people who are here. I daresay it won’t be very long before she returns.”

“I should have liked to see her—but I can’t wait. I must be off from this place almost immediately. Say good-bye to her for me. You have always been very good to me, you and she.”

Athelyn made no answer, but looked at

him questioningly, and half wonderingly, in thoughtful silence. Neither did he say anything further ; he seemed sunk in some deep pondering.

“What are you thinking of, Paul?” she asked, presently, gently touching him on the arm.

“Of nothing, Athelyn,” he said, rousing himself almost with a start. “At least, of many things,” he amended his speech with a slight smile. “I have enough to think of, haven’t I?”

“How soon do you think you will—find—them?” she asked, her lips seeming reluctant to frame the last words.

“How can I tell? Well, good-bye, Athelyn, now.” He took her hands, and wrung them close in his ; and on some sudden impulse he added, abruptly, half hesitatingly, “If—if——”

“If what?”

“If it should happen that we do not meet again—one never knows what may occur, and the world is full of strange accidents—I should like you and yours to think as kindly of me as you can.”

He would have released her hands and turned away, but she kept them fast in hers.

“What—what are you thinking of doing?” she asked, very quietly.

“Some good if I can. And if not—well! Evil comes of Evil!”

She paused a moment, looking him through with a searching gaze; then she went on to ask, reluctantly and shrinkingly, but resolutely forcing herself to put the question.

“You will seek—*her* first—or—*him*?”

“Him.”

“And what—Paul!—what *can* be said between you two?”



“There’s no need of words to show him the work he has done—”

He paused, checked himself, as if he had said enough, but not all he meant. She involuntarily put up her hands to her face as if to shut some picture from her eyes.

“No need indeed,” she murmured, with a long half stifled sigh. “Paul!” she then added, with sudden eagerness, “*why* should you seek to see him? All is over now—the gulf is fixed. No wound can smart for ever—I suppose! We outlive all things, they say; and you will outlive—this. Why keep the wound open longer by seeking to stand face to face with the cause? It will heal—and heal the quicker if you do not see them. The world is wide; your ways need never, never touch. And you will learn, if not to forget, to——” Her voice quivered; the last word died unuttered;

and she looked up at him anxiously in mute suspense.

“I ?” he said—

“With a sort of melancholy impatient scorn,  
As some grown man who never had a child  
Puts by some child who plays at being a man.”

“But *she* ? but what for *her* ? Who is to retrieve *her* ruined life ? who is to stretch a hand to lift her out of the depths where he has dragged her back ? where he will leave her again, when his poisonous fancy is satiated, as surely as he deserted her before ? You talk of *me*, a man with strength to endure and the world to work in—but who is to right *her* wrong ? Only he can do it ; and he *shall* ! I shall never look upon her face again on earth with my own will ! But my one part in life is to see that he amends the work that he has done.”

“Yes !” she assented, her eyes glowing as if they caught the fire from his. “I under-

stand ! If he will do it—*if* he will, it is the one thing left ! But—can you influence him ?”

“I’m not much in the mood for fair words,” Paul said, his coolness breaking down a little. “But I’ll try my best for her. And as to the upshot—if it ends in my killing him, my conscience won’t reproach me more than if I had put a mad dog out of the way ! And if it ends in *my* death, why, it will be a less crime on his head than this is ! There are stains beside which death is pale ! Why did you press me with questions, Athelyn ? it is not fit I should speak so to *you*.”

She stood white and dumb with terror. She had thought she knew the worst, had fathomed the depths ; but quick as light, a horror of worse things yet had seized her ; she had a fearful vision of the possible fruit that evil seed might bear—saw that what had

been was as pale twilight beside the black eclipse of what yet might be.

She knew, none better, Harold's haughty temper and indomitable spirit; she saw in Paul the terrible smouldering resentment of a nature habitually gentle; she trembled and felt faint with fear of the consequences of a collision between these two. She could not speak for awhile; then she exclaimed in vehement pleading and protest,

"Paul, are you mad—are you mad? Do you think that *threats* will move him?"

"I cannot have been quite in my right senses, I think, to speak so to *you*," he answered, regaining a careful forced composure. "I am sorry, Athelyn. Sufficient for the day is the evil. Think no more of any rash words of mine."

"But did you mean them, Paul?" She looked up in his face with a piercing scrutiny. "Oh, you need not answer! I

*see* you did ! ” Her eyes were half wild in their desperate earnestness as she added, warmly, “ What are you thinking of ? are you dreaming that threat or challenge—that violence or dispute—will move him one whit ? You do not know him ! you can do no good. You cannot see him calmly ; there can be no gentle dealing between you two ; your seeing him will only snap the last thread of a chance of his doing what is right.”

“ But I shall see him nevertheless,” said Paul, with unmoved obstinacy.

Her hands twitched nervously, as if involuntarily tending to clasp in vain appeal ; then she pressed one hand upon her heart as if to hush a deep fluttering breath, and lifted her head with a sort of slow-forming resolution. She stood before him pale as death, her eyes fixed upon him, yet seeming to see beyond him things far away, her soft

lips setting in a firmer line ; what she was thinking he could not tell.

“Don’t worry yourself, Athelyn. Leave the future, near or distant, to take care of itself. All may go well. And for you—keep on the sweet even tenor of your way. We—all of those who have crossed your path and brought you storm and trouble—things so unknown to you!—are gone out of your calm life for ever !”

A faint half scornful smile curled her lip.

“You may all be gone out of my ‘calm life,’” she said, quietly, “but I can scarcely forget you all so soon.”

“Not soon ; but Time will heal all things. Good-bye, Athelyn.”

“Good-bye in a minute—but I have one thing to say first. When you find them, Paul, tell him to come to me.”

“To *you* !”

“Yes, to me—to *me*,” she reiterated, with resolute emphasis. “Or let me know at once—directly you know—where he is ; and I will send for him myself. Paul, listen, and don’t look as if you thought I was mad ! I’m not a child to be turned from my purpose. Do you think that *I* have no part in this ? that you can leave me behind to ‘keep the even tenor of my way’ ? that all your paths diverge here from mine ? I tell you, I too have a stake in this—I must and will see Harold Parkhurst, and you must help me to see him ! And if—if you don’t help me, and if—and if—harm comes of my *not* seeing him—I’ll never forgive you, Paul, in this world or the next !”

## CHAPTER XIV.

## OVER THE PLOUGHSHARES.

She stood up in bitter case, with a pale yet steady face,  
 Like a statue thunderstruck which tho' stricken seems  
     to look  
 Right against the thunder-place !

E. B. BROWNING.

PAUL SEVERNE is in Paris, busily prosecuting inquiries among the artistic colony and at the English hotels, wherever he deems a clue may be found to the whereabouts of Harold Parkhurst.

Mrs. Hastings and Athelyn are in Paris ; they had followed in Paul's track as soon as Mrs. Hastings could be hurried through her few preparations. Athelyn, wild with



anxiety, would fain have fled from Fontainebleau by the next train, and had waited chafing like a greyhound held in the leash while her mother wrote letters, superintended the packing of trunks, and made ready to start.

She is haunted by feverish fears of a meeting between Paul and Harold. She has extorted from the former a reluctant promise that "when he learns where they are he will let her know." This is all the frail safeguard she has to cling to against the danger she fears. The dread of some collision between those two—the one strong in just resentment, the other haughty in wrong-doing and contemptuously defiant (she can see so plainly in her mind's eye the look with which he would meet interference, rebuke, or reproach)—this dread is ever present with her. It dogs her steps by day closely as her shadow; turn where she will

she cannot leave it behind ; it paints horrible pictures on the darkness at night.

Now here, in Paris, where they may or may not be, where Paul is seeking them and she sits by in enforced helplessness, watching his search and craving for news, the sense of this utter powerlessness of hers galls her like a chain hanging heavy and clanking on her limbs. She can do nothing ; she cannot wander by herself, seeking, about the busy streets of Paris, where insolent looks of admiration are turned upon her Anglo-Saxon beauty ; she can only glance with eager half fearful eyes at every passer-by, sit by the window and watch and wait, while her very soul seems dying within her for news.

She is for ever listening breathlessly, as if to catch the echo of some alarm ; she cannot rest indoors ; she must always be out—driving, walking, in gallery, or church, palace

or garden, it matters not where, only she says eagerly, "Anywhere, where there are people. Wherever you like, if it is where many people go!" Mrs. Hastings indulges her darling as usual. The girl would go mad if she were shut up indoors now to brood alone, when her soul is out wandering in a restless, ceaseless search.

They seldom see Paul, and when they do, his report is always "No news, no clue," till fear deferred sometimes makes her heart well-nigh as sick as deferred hope could do. Sometimes she thinks that they may be far away by this time; they perhaps never meant to return to Paris at all; they may now be sailing southern seas, and neither she nor Paul will ever see them more.

Thinking this, her heart swells with a sense of relief from a great fear, but yet a relief that is curiously mixed and fused into an unaccountable pain. Then again she

thinks that, even in that very hour, chance may have thrown Paul across *his* path; and will Paul keep his word, and send her message "I have found him"? If he does not!—she trembles, for she knows that, if Paul breaks his promise and keeps silence, it will be for evil, not for good, and if he does bring the news straight to her and tells her "They are found," then her great ordeal will be at her door. She dares not think of it further, except in a vague, blind trust that is in itself an unworded prayer, that she may bear herself bravely and be strong to tread the path which lies before her, and which she must walk alone.

She is fond of wandering about the galleries of the Louvre, and there the object which attracts her the oftenest is the Venus of Milo.

Harold loved it too. She can never escape from the thought of him; perhaps

she does not wish it, for in that red-hung room, where the great white queen reigns alone, his memory holds her fastest, and there, day after day, she turns her steps. Often she begs her mother to leave her there and go to the other galleries, as the contemplation of any one object of art is apt to pall on Mrs. Hastings.

One day Athelyn is sitting there by herself, day-dreaming, in the cool-tempered light that strikes through the high windows on the white glory of that peerless marble majesty. In her reverie she vaguely feels the influence of that immortal beauty, looking on which one wonders how it could for ages have slept undiscovered, unsuspected, with the damp earth over its grand and gracious curves. How was it that men did not start and quiver like the witch-wand near hidden water when they passed the spot where she lay—*Venus victrix*—con-

quering Time and Man, and victress even over the Fate that grudged her flawless loveliness to earth, and maimed and yet could scarcely mar her! None can look on her and deem she represents the perfection of bodily beauty alone. To gaze on her in her supremacy is to feel the incompleteness of mere form; she is above it and beyond it. She stands in herself the incarnation of Nature's forgotten law of the wedlock of beauty of soul and body, so often now divorced on earth into imperfect halves, but in Eternity allied into a consummate whole. There, while generations come and go, and revolutions shake and wars devastate the lands, she stands immovable and peerless through the ages, woman as she might be, superb in form and soul, with the divine light crowning the completeness of human beauty on her perfect face.

Athelyn is lost in reverie beside her,

when something—she cannot tell whether it is an instinct or some light sound, a whisper or a rustle striking on her ear—leads her to turn suddenly. She glances into the adjoining gallery; and amongst the sparse groups scattered about there she sees two figures—a girl with golden-tawny hair, of whom she catches a profile view; a man beside the girl, whose back is turned to her as he looks up at a statue. She does not need to see his face; the lithe tall sinewy figure, the dark wavy hair, the half haughty bearing of the head, are more familiar to her than her own face in the glass. There is never an hour of the night or day when they are not before her mind's eye now.

And yet now that she sees them again in life and daylight she starts; and it seems that bolts of ice and fire run through her veins. It is oftentimes more of a shock to see the expected object of all our thoughts

than to be faced by any apparition that is furthest from our dreams. She stands rooted to the spot ; a sense of dizziness and faintness comes over her, a wild desire to turn and fly from the place, then a perception that now and here is the opportunity she has craved ; and though it seems as if it would be life to fly and death to stay, yet she must stand her ground and face these two.

Fate seemed to take a malignant pleasure, both then and thereafter, in driving Athelyn into positions where, to be true to her own bravest and noblest instincts, she must be false to the traditional dignity and modesty of gently-bred maidenhood. This Fate was forcing upon her roughly and ruthlessly the cold truth that, to live up to your highest possibilities, you must first be a woman noble, self-sustained, self-sacrificing, and strong—and from that a lady hedged round



with all the divinity of delicacy and grace.

The root without the flower is coarse, unbeautiful strength; the flower without the root is a pretty useless toy and trifle, frail as the convolvulus, to wilt and drop off from one's life in day of storm. Only from the deep strong root can the true rose blossom in its fullest fairness. Athelyn, by nature modest and sensitive, and by breeding reserved and refined, was constantly forced by the Fates that had taken her life into their stern hands into situations where she stood between her courage and her delicacy—with all her soft and maidenly graces on the one side, and on the other all the high and heroic impulses of a nature that cannot lurk and hide in the rear when the battle-call rings along the front. Placed suddenly in these positions, she must choose on the spur of the moment which way to turn.

This day in the Louvre the dilemma faces her abruptly. She has never fully comprehended till this moment how great is the task she has set herself. Every instinct of her womanhood prompts her to turn and fly that sight. She shrinks as if from an incarnation of shame, she whose eyes have never knowingly looked on sin. Yet here is the chance she has sought, though she has not sought that it should come upon her *so*—that she should see these two together. If she holds her peace and turns from them now, will she ever have the opportunity to speak again? Will not the chance, the poor faint chance that yet is the only one, of endeavouring to right the wrong, pass from her for ever? Is not Paul on their track? and if harm comes of his meeting them, will not the responsibility lie on *her* soul, if she, coward-like, shrinks and flees from her self-appointed duty now?

They have turned, and are coming nearer—the man who loved her and left her, and by the ruin into which he has led her friend has set a yawning gulf between himself and her—the friend who, wittingly or unwittingly, has snatched from her the last gleam of her one sweet hope—the two whom she has loyally loved and who are weighed in the balance and found wanting, whose failure has let the bitter waters loose over her life, the stainless life from which they two have turned away.

They are close to her now; the moment has come when she must choose her part.

It takes a good deal to alter or stir Harold Parkhurst's picturesque imperturbable face. But even he is not proof against some slight change of countenance when he finds himself unexpectedly face to face with Athelyn Hastings. There is something deeper than surprised annoyance in his eyes,

and his lips set into their sternest line under the heavy moustache that half hides them.

Cressida, with a faint gasp and start of utter dismay, falls a step backward. Athelyn moves a step nearer, and fronts them silently. For a moment they both look at her in suspense; and then the question flashes across them simultaneously, "Does she know?"

Only for that moment they wonder; in one look at her, her presence tells its own tale, needs no words. They see that this meeting—with them together—is no surprise to her. There is no astonishment, no agitation, no reproach nor dismay, in her set calm face. The face of the marble queen above is scarcely more fixed and white.

Her glance passes over Cressida, and settles upon *him*.

“Harold,” she says, very quietly, each syllable falling clear and cold and keen as an icicle, “I must speak to you! Not now, nor here; but I must see you. You will come to me, and let me say to you the little I have to say.”

“I am at a loss,” he answers, as coldly and steadily as she, “to imagine what you can have to say to me—that had not better be left unsaid.”

“But you will come and hear it,” she rejoins, with the same strange still resolution in her tone.

Her eyes are fixed upon him; they hold him to the spot and will not let him go. Cressida has shrunk back, and they two stand close and face to face.

“You will come and hear it?”

“To what good end?” he says.

There is a certain softening in his dark

eyes, if not in his chill tone. He does not blench or recoil. Even now he can look Athelyn straight in the face.

“You will come?” she repeats. “Here is my address. Take it; and come to me to-day; soon. You can? you will?”

He takes the card from her hand; there is something in her tone which he finds it hard to resist, although it seems to him scarcely less startling than if the stone lips of the Venus had parted in speech, that she should seek an interview with him now. And still her fixed eyes hold him as if fettered to the spot.

“Would it not be best that we should not meet? Our ways lie far apart,” he says.

“Far apart,” she echoes, with cold and passionless emphasis. “Think! should I ask you to come to me without good reason? There is something I wish to say

to you ; and you will come ; it is the last time I shall ever ask it of you."

The clear still ice of her tone melts a little in the last words ; there is a touch of bitterness, a thrill of pain, just detectable in them. Only a touch. Probably had they melted more, he would have yielded less readily.

"I'll come, Athelyn," he promises.

He does not turn one glance of appeal or consultation towards Cressida ; she is near them and must have heard her words, but she has uttered no syllable. Now, when Harold has consented and given his promise to come, Athelyn's eyes release him, and she looks at Cressida.

They both remember afterwards that it was not in stern rebuke or in shrinking reproach that Athelyn's gaze rested on her. Only for a moment it dwelt upon her—full, in unutterable sadness. In a sorrow, with-

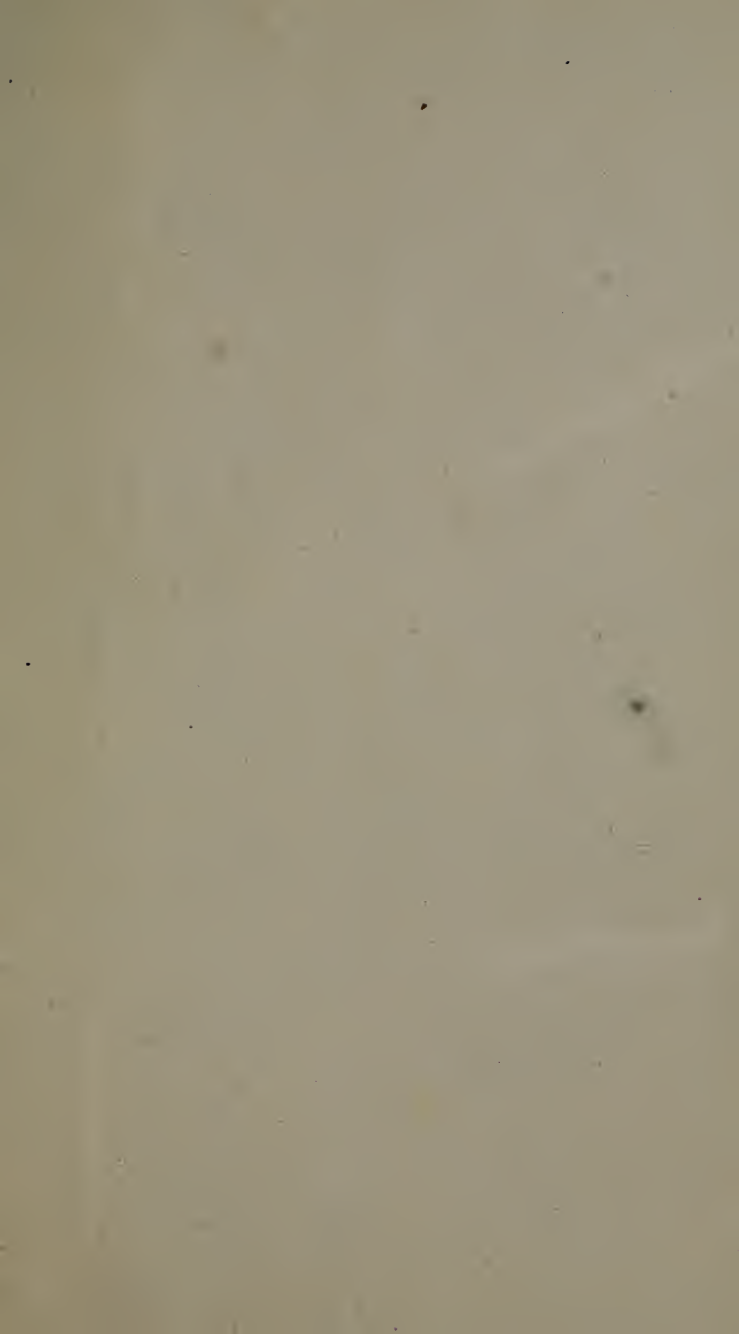
out alloy of anger, it said, "Farewell!" And Cressida's look clung to hers in a wild pain and questioning, a half-defiant shame, as if Cressida, shrinking herself, sought in strange doubt and wonder to read the other's soul.

Then Athelyn glides away from them without another word. She has passed out of their sight, soft and noiseless as a ghost; she is lost among the moving groups; they are standing as she left them, almost wondering whether this meeting has been a dream. But the slip of paper with her address is in Harold's hand in token of his promise.

He looks at Cressida for the first time.

"This is the Venus of Milo," he says, in a matter-of-fact tone. "This is the best light to view it in; you had better stand here."









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